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## **THESIS**

**TURKEY AND THE NORTH CAUCASUS: AN ANALYSIS  
OF INTERNAL AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS**

by

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**TURKEY AND THE NORTH CAUCASUS: AN ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL AND  
DOMESTIC RELATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the Circassian history starting from their deportation in 1860s from Russian Empire to Ottoman lands to the present day. Although the Circassian minority constitutes a significant part of Turkey's population, the actual history of this small nation is disproportionately not well known both within the Circassian diaspora and the Turkish population at large. This thesis investigates the evaluation of Circassian identity and diaspora during late Ottoman Era and during the Republic of Turkey from a theoretical, historical and practical view and evaluates the role of the various domestic and international factors in the course of current diaspora structure in Turkey. This thesis also traces the role of Circassian association and organizations over the establishment of diaspora identity and representation of this ethnic group both within the Turkish population and within the state structure.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A.	THE GOAL OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	1
B.	SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY.....	1
C.	PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS .....	5
D.	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
E.	METHODS AND SOURCES .....	16
F.	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	17
G.	WHO ARE THE CIRCASSIANS? .....	18
1.	People and Country.....	18
2.	Demography.....	19
3.	Language.....	21
4.	Religion.....	22
5.	Socio-Political Structure .....	23
6.	Xabze (Habze) .....	24
7.	Economy.....	25
<b>II.</b>	<b>A SHORT CIRCASSIAN HISTORY.....</b>	<b>27</b>
A.	FROM 1 <sup>ST</sup> MILLENIUM BC TO 18 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY .....	27
B.	THE RUSSIAN-CIRCASSIAN WAR TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION.....	29
C.	THE WAY TO 1864, AND THE FINAL BATTLE .....	33
D.	RUSSIAN CONQUEST OF CIRCASSIANS .....	35
E.	OTTOMAN POLICY TOWARD THE NORTH CAUCASUS.....	38
F.	LIFE IN THE OTTOMAN LANDS.....	41
G.	ABDULHAMID II AND CIRCASSIANS.....	49
H.	CONCLUSION .....	51
<b>III.</b>	<b>CIRCASSIAN IDENTITY FROM LATE OTTOMAN ERA TO PRESENT .....</b>	<b>55</b>
A.	CIRCASSIANS AS A DIASPORIC COMMUNITY .....	56
B.	CIRCASSIANS IN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE.....	61
C.	CIRCASSIANS AND TURKISH NATIONALISM DURING THE OTTOMAN ERA.....	62
D.	KEMALIST DEFINITION OF NATIONALISM AND CIRCASSIANS..	67
E.	CIRCASSIAN ELITE .....	76
F.	PARA-MILITARISM AND THE CERKES ETHEM AFFAIR.....	78
G.	NATIONALISM AFTER MUSTAFA KEMAL .....	85
H.	EXTREME NATIONALISM IN TURKEY AND CIRCASSIANS.....	87
I.	IDENTITY IN TRANSITION: KEMALISM UNDER STRAIN (1990S AND 2000S).....	93
J.	RISE OF THE ISLAM IN MODERN TURKEY (1990S AND 2000S)..	94
K.	CONCLUSION .....	95
<b>IV.</b>	<b>NORTH CAUCASUS ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS IN TURKEY .....</b>	<b>97</b>

A.	CIRCASSIAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE OTTOMAN ERA.....	98
B.	RE-CREATION OF CIRCASSIAN ASSOCIATIONS: 1950S TO 1980 .....	105
C.	MILITARY COUP IN 1980 AND CIRCASSIAN DIASPORA POLITICS THEREAFTER.....	109
D.	CIRCASSIAN DIASPORA FROM 2000 TO PRESENT .....	122
E.	ROAD TO SOCHI.....	127
F.	CONCLUSION .....	134
V.	CONCLUSION.....	137
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	149
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	161

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AKKGD	North Caucasian Cultural Association of Ankara ( <i>Ankara Kuzey Kafkas Kultur Dernegi</i> )
AKP	Justice and Development Party ( <i>Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi</i> )
ANAP	Motherland Party ( <i>Anavatan Partisi</i> )
BSEC	Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CITC	Circassian Union and Support Association ( <i>Cerkes Ittihat ve Teavun Cemiyeti</i> )
CKMP	Republican Peasant-Nation Party ( <i>Cumhuriyetci Koylu Millet Partisi</i> )
CKNM	Circassian Girl School ( <i>Çerkes Kız Numune Mektebi</i> )
CKTC	Circassian Womens' Support Association ( <i>Çerkes Kadınları Teavün Cemiyeti</i> )
CT	Circassian Trust ( <i>Kafkas Vakfi</i> )
CTC	Circassian Union and Support Association ( <i>Cerkes Teavun Cemiyeti</i> )
CUP	Committee for Union and Progress
DID	Nine Lights Doctrine ( <i>Dokuz Isik Doktrini</i> )
DYD	Dosteli Solidarity Association ( <i>Dosteli Yardımlasma Dernegi</i> )
ICA	International Circassian Association
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
KADK	Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee ( <i>Kafkas-Abhazya Dayanisma Komitesi</i> )
KAFDER	Caucasian Association ( <i>Kafkas Dernegi</i> )
KAFFED	Caucasian Associations Federation ( <i>Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu</i> )
KCDK	Caucasian–Chechen Solidarity Committee ( <i>Kafkas-Cecen Dayanisma Komitesi</i> )
KKD	Caucasian Cultural Association ( <i>Kafkas Kultur Dernegi</i> )
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SKC	North Caucasus Society ( <i>Şimali Kafkas Cemiyeti</i> )
STO	<i>Sivil Toplum Orgutleri</i>

TGMDF	Turkish Federation of Immigrants and Refugees ( <i>Türk Göçmen ve Mülteci Dernekleri Federasyonu</i> ).
TGNA	Turkish Grand National Assembly.
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UCA	United Caucasus Association
WCO	World Circassian Association

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. THE GOAL OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The central objective of this thesis is to explore the role of civil society organizations in shaping Circassian identity during the Turkish diaspora, and how these groups influenced Turkish foreign policy in the North Caucasus. This research will attempt to provide answers to the following questions: What is the impact of Circassian organizations within the Circassian population in Turkey? What kind of activities have they employed to influence discussion of national identity in Turkey? How should one interpret the significance of Circassians within Turkish politics? How do Circassian organizations reflect trends and tensions within the development of Turkish civil society and the evolution of Turkish nationalism? To what degree have these organizations been successful in influencing the direction of Turkish foreign policy? To answer these questions, this study will provide a short history of the Circassian people in Turkey and will examine the organizations that have influenced the historical development of this diaspora.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

Circassians constitute one of the largest ethnic minorities living in Turkey. As a result of the Ottoman settlement policy, Circassian people were settled throughout the greater Middle East, including Turkey. Today, Circassians live in many countries, and Turkey, as the heir of the Ottoman Empire, has the largest population in the world. Only rough estimates can be made about the population; however, Kemal Karpaz estimates that two million Circassians immigrated to Turkey between 1856 and 1876.<sup>1</sup> Today, perhaps five million Circassians live in Turkey, although only two million still consider themselves Circassian (rather than “of Circassian descent”) and, unfortunately, less than one million can still

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<sup>1</sup> Kemal Karpaz, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 68–69.

speak the Circassian language.<sup>2</sup> According to the Caucasian Foundation, the Circassian population reaches to seven million in Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

Since there is no established definition about who Circassians are, different theories identify these people from various perspectives. The term Circassian refers to the people of the North Caucasus region whose self-designation is Adyge, and they are identified by different names in different countries. In Russia, they are identified with the names of the autonomous republics where they live: Adyge people in the Adyge Republic, Cherkess in Karachay-Cherkessia, and Kabardin in Kabardino-Balkaria. However, in Turkey, “Circassian” has become a cover term that embraces all the displaced people of the North Caucasus. In this manner, the terminology encompasses the group in a social and historical manner rather than an ethnic distinction.<sup>4</sup> Amjad Jaimoukha summarizes the various concepts about Turkish Circassians under three main categories. First, Circassian is an umbrella term for all North Caucasus people living in Turkey. Second, Circassian is a term for the Northwest Caucasian people, such as the Adyge, Abkhaz, Abazin, and Ubykh who are ethnically and linguistically related. Third, Circassian is a term that specifies the ethnic Adyge.<sup>5</sup> “Every Adyge is Circassian, but every Circassian is not Adyge,” according to Circassian intellectual Ismail Berkok’s definition.<sup>6</sup> The first usage of the term Circassian dates back to thirteenth century Turkish records denoting the Adyge-speaking tribes of the Western and Central North Caucasus; it has gained a widespread use since.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 130.

<sup>3</sup> Kafkas Vakfı, Diaspora, Türkiye, accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://www.kafkas.org.tr/diaspora/turkiye.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Arsen Avagyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Kemalist Türkiye’nin Devlet-İktidar Sisteminde Çerkesler (Circassians in the State and Power Structures of the Ottoman Empire and Kemalist Turkey)* (L. Denisenko, Trans.) (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2004), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Amjad Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Gonul Ertem, “Dancing to Modernity: Cultural Politics of Cherkess Nationhood in the Hearthland of Turkey,” PhD Dissertation (Texas: University of Texas, 2000), 150.

<sup>7</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 20.



The Circassian people and their war with Tsarist Russia in the nineteenth century are not well-studied subjects. As a result of the Russian conquest of the North Caucasus and the suppression of the local population, most of the region's Circassian population was forcibly deported from their homeland to the Ottoman Empire. At first, the Ottoman Empire voluntarily received Muslim Caucasian refugees, who were known as good fighters and loyal subjects of the sultan.<sup>8</sup> However, the mismanagement of the deportation and the Russians' brutal campaign to get rid of non-Russian people created a tragedy. In addition to the thousands of people who died in the Caucasus while resisting Russian troops, thousands more died on the way to their new lands or from starvation and disease during the course of their resettlement in the Ottoman Empire. The violence committed against Circassians in the Caucasus and the suffering they experienced during the course of their resettlement in the Ottoman Empire have not gained much attention, compared to other studies of genocide or ethnic cleansing.

Examining Circassians within the political discourse of the late Ottoman era and contemporary Turkey contributes to the literature of diaspora identities and ethnic nationalism. Since diasporas are living communities and political groups, they should be examined not just as particular groups that are formed vis-à-vis the nation state, but also as political bodies that are evaluated through several discourses, such as nationalism, identity, citizenship, loyalty, and militarism. Starting with the idea that not all states are nation-states, this thesis contributes to the general understanding of nationalism without a nation-state by examining the question of how the nation is imagined as their homeland and by creating multiple attachments to attain these homelands as their own state. The meanings and examples that pertain to ethnicity and citizenship should be understood not only through the eyes of assimilation, suppression, conflict, and tension between a superior nation and an ethnic minority, but also within their

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<sup>8</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 32.

own complexity, with the recognition of the multiplicity of actors and forces that are shaped by the terrains of nationalism, ethnicity, identity, and citizenship.

The definition problem is also linked with the identity problem of the Circassian people, as well as the other minorities under the rule of the Republic of Turkey. The role of ethnic identity within the imagined binding term of “Turkish National Identity” was suppressed until the democratization movements during the 1960s. Generally, they have been situated at different societal levels. Ethnicity has been observed through “minority” cultures, whereas nationalism has been interpreted through state ideology. While all minorities were represented under the term of Ottoman Muslim during the late years of the Ottoman Empire, Kemalist nationalist definition did not encompass ethnic groups during the first decades of the Republic. Hence, national identity was structured by banning the use of ethnic languages and banning the demonstration of ethnic cultural figures in the community.

With the latest democratization efforts in Turkey during the last decade, ethnic minorities, such as Circassians, have gained many rights, such as television broadcasts and education in minority languages. Circassian groups and organizations have significant roles to create and solidify Circassian identity and culture in many towns in Turkey. In recent years, it also seems apparent that Circassian social organizations may play a significant role for the construction of cultural identity, and also to influence Turkish foreign policy, vis-à-vis relations with Russia.

Circassian exile and their sufferings under the Russian regime have received more attention with the announcement of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Elements of the Circassian diaspora, particularly in Turkey, have attempted to bring the attention of the world to their history of exile and sufferings. News accounts of these efforts appearing in the pages of world-famous publications are an important issue. With the upcoming Sochi Winter Olympics, Circassian associations have organized efforts, both in the North Caucasus region and diaspora countries, to protest the games. Some have

suggested that this opposition to the games may threaten the security of the Olympics. Others have hoped that Russia would acknowledge the history of violence against North Caucasians.

### **C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS**

This thesis examines Circassian exile and Circassian organizations in Turkey. Although the Circassian minority constitutes an important part of Turkey's population, the actual history of this small nation is disproportionately not well known, within the Circassian diaspora and the Turkish population at large. One of the hypotheses of this study is that the Circassian minority in Turkey occupies a loyal and peaceful niche compared to the other minorities. This loyalty to the existing regime is a unique cultural characteristic of the Circassians, which has developed as a result of their history.

Defining the Circassian people in Turkey from their massive deportations to the current date is a complicated subject. There are pro-Circassian people who mention the bravery of their ancestors during the wars of the late Ottoman era and the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) era. Circassian participation in the War of Independence was very high compared to the other ethnic nationalities. Eleven out of twenty leaders promoted to the rank of veteran were of Circassian origin, and nearly all of the Defense Ministers were of Circassian origin during the CUP administration.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the outbreak of the Anzavur rebellion among Circassian communities along the southern coast of the sea of Marmara and the aborted assassination attempt on Mustafa Kemal in Izmir in 1926 were signs of disloyalty to the state that blemished Circassian loyalty, as well as the little-known actions of the "Special Organization" (Teskilat-i Mahsusa) led by another controversial Circassian figure, Esref Kuscubasi.<sup>10</sup> According to Avagyan, Circassians were also a special threat

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<sup>9</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 277–281.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan Gingeras, "The Sons of Two Fatherlands: Turkey and the North Caucasus Diaspora, 1914–1923," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (2011), 12.

with their great contribution to the War of Independence, since the state was attempting to present the collective efforts of the war as a pure Turkish nationalist movement on which the Republic would be built.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, there is a dichotomy of the ideas within the Circassian community, which represents the independent characteristics of a small nation. In history, they could not manage to create a long-lived state structure, and basically lived in a separate manner. Today, it is possible to see such variety in formal organizations and informal groups in Turkey. A previous lack of collective action shifted to an opposition against the Sochi Winter Olympics with the help of Circassian organizations, especially when the Caucasian Associations Federation (Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu or KAFFED) stimulated identity within the Circassian community and turned into a uniting force.

Thirdly, because of the lack of unity in actions and rhetoric, Circassian organizations could not go far from the cultural perspective in Turkey. Their political influences have not created enough stimuli among the population and have not been represented at high levels in the Turkish administration.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Circassians, similar to Kurds and Alevis, are one of the major ethnic groups in Turkey. They have maintained their traditions until today and reflected their cultural differences to the Anatolian culture. However, their struggle under Russian rule and the tension to create a Circassian identity under the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey are not examined in detail. Lack of institutionalization among Circassians throughout history, and different policies about the ethnic nations under Ottoman and Modern Turkey, can be shown as the main reasons for the lack of literature about Circassians. During their first years under the Ottoman regime, Circassians managed to establish some organizations and published magazines to preserve their culture, language, and different identity. However, with the process of creating a “modern nation state”

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<sup>11</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 256.

under Kemalist policy, all organizations were closed down and all publications were restricted, as well as other implications of this policy between 1925 and 1946. This policy has changed from the 1990s onwards, and therefore most of the publications are relatively new.

Most of the literature dating before the “great Exile of 1864” is based on the accounts or reports of travelers, businessmen, and some government personnel, such as the British diplomats D. Urquhart, E. Spencer, J.S. Bell, and J. Longworth.<sup>12</sup> Since they lived among the Circassians, their works are invaluable contributions to the social structure of the community during their visit. Justin McCarthy’s book<sup>13</sup> is one of the first well-documented and comprehensive western accounts of the treatment of Ottoman Muslims from the 1820s to the creation of the Republic of Turkey. The second chapter of the book covers the Circassian wars, in which over half a million people were killed and the Abkhazian nation was decimated.

Walter Richmond’s two books provide a great deal of history of the Circassians in their homeland and in Turkey.<sup>14</sup> These two sources, as well as Amjad Jaimoukha’s book,<sup>15</sup> are well-written introductory documents to understand who the Circassians are, and what makes them different within a historical concept.

Recent literature about the Circassian population and the ethnic diversity of Turkey helps us understand the role of Circassians during the creation phase

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<sup>12</sup> David Urquhart was the British agent appointed by the British foreign Minister Lord Palmerston to prepare a document about the North Caucasus region based on the British interest over the region. Later he was appointed as the secretary to the British ambassador in Ottoman Empire and he set up contacts with the early deported Circassians in Istanbul. He travelled to North Caucasus many times and Edmund Spencer, James Stanislaus Bell, and John Augustus Longworth accompanied him during his different visits. They all wrote about their observations and these are one of the first writing about the region. See. *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 70–73.

<sup>13</sup> Justin McCartney, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1995), 23–58.

<sup>14</sup> See Walter Richmond, *The Northwest Caucasus* (New York: Routledge, 2011) and *The Circassian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> See Amjad Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

of the republic and the consequences of ethnic diversity in current Turkish politics. The two works of Professor Gingeras liberate us from approaching Turkey as a monolithic whole.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Gingeras' *Sorrowful Shores*<sup>17</sup> presents the shared history of Western Anatolia between the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912 and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. During these time periods, both ethnic minorities were quite influential in the contemporary structure of the region, as well as other parts of the country where they were deployed during this period. Arsen Avagyan also provides a unique and not well-known history of Circassians acting as a corporate group with stated communal goals under the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid and the CUP, and the use of ethnic solidarity for mass mobilization during the period between 1919 and 1922.<sup>18</sup>

The search for identity became the source of tension in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. In his article, Kemal Karpaz presents the complex nature of political identity and political legitimacy during the late Ottoman Era. He defines how three pre-existing identities—Ottoman, Muslim, and Turk—evolved into a single “national” identity during the late Ottoman era and in the Republic of Turkey. Three identities were used interchangeably until the time of the republic; however, the ethnic Turkishness did not answer all of the identities when the state refused the other two in the early 1930s.<sup>19</sup> The usage of the term “Turk” emerged during the late Ottoman era. “By the mid-1890s the elites regarded the term “Turk” expressing both their affiliation with the state and

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<sup>16</sup> See Ryan Gingeras, “Notorious Subjects, Invisible Citizens: North Caucasian Resistance to the Turkish National Movement in Northwestern Anatolia, 1919–23,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, no. 1 (2008): 89–108. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/59813618?accountid=12702>; Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> See Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> See Avagyan, *Çerkesler*.

<sup>19</sup> Kemal Karpaz, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.

their Islamic and Ottoman identity without affecting their special Albanian, Circassian or even Arab ethnic identity.”<sup>20</sup>

Kemal Kirisci and Soner Cagaptay have deemphasized previous studies to understand the development of Turkish nationalism using state practices as the key elements to understand the articulation of nationalism by the state elite. The ethnic identity of the Turkish Republic is defined as “Turkishness” in Kemal Kirisci’s article.<sup>21</sup> Although the citizenship was defined as “Turks” in the 1924 constitution, the government aimed to embrace all different ethnic and religious groups, which were once identified as Ottoman or Muslim, under the single term of “Turkishness.” Cagaptay argues that in the inter war period, Kemalist secularism was very successful in eliminating religion from the public sphere, as well as other ethnic identities, in Turkey, leaving the Turkish National Identity devoid of religious and multi-ethnic concepts.<sup>22</sup>

Turkish national identity, in Geller’s words, is defined as “an unselfconscious blend of Kemalist republicanism and urban Islam fusing Turkish and Muslim identity in an apparently seamless web of symbol and sentiment, as Ottoman and Muslim may blend once again.”<sup>23</sup> Also, Gellner defines nationalism as “a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic social bond. Whatever principles of authority may exist between people depend for their legitimacy on the fact that the members of the group concerned are of the same culture.”<sup>24</sup> According to this definition, nationalism arises from intense identity and identity arises from the cultural solidarity on which the Turkish State was established. From this perspective, supporting Circassian cultural and linguistic

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<sup>20</sup> Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> See Kemal Kirisci, “The EU as a Vehicle of Post-national Transformation,” In *Turkey Beyond Nationalism, Towards Post-national Identities*, Edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> See Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is Turk?* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 3–4.

activities under well-organized structures will promote the rise of identity; Circassian organizations have been successful with this issue so far.

Erik Jan Zürcher examines the emergence of Turkish national identity between the last era of the Ottoman Empire and the first fifteen years of the Turkish Republic. He attempts to define the binding forces on which the Ottoman Empire and Turkey were built in three different eras: Before the Young Turks period, the Young Turks period, and the Kemalist era. During the first era, being an Ottoman and being a Muslim was the binding force, while during the second era the term “Ottoman Muslim” became the identity. During this period Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism were not rejected totally and were used as supplementary elements of the new identity. Therefore, as mentioned by Bernard Lewis, Turkish speaking Ottoman Muslims of Balkan and Caucasian descent played a considerable role in the national movement.<sup>25</sup>

Hakan Yavuz labels the national identity that has come to dominate Turkey as Neo-Ottomanism, the current state identity that has arguably been widely adopted by the ruling Party of Justice and Development (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi or AKP). He states that, “in recent years, Ottoman-Islamic origins of Turkish nationhood in particular have become more assertive and effective in conditioning and shaping the state’s policies and society’s perception of ‘self.’”<sup>26</sup> Yavuz describes how new neo-Ottoman identity has come to challenge the traditional post-Ottoman Turkish national identity, which is a current example of the changing and evolving notion of identity. Thus, Yavuz’s article aids this study by presenting how identity is important for foreign policy and how it serves the direction of foreign policy. Yavuz supplements his ideas of neo-Ottomanism and makes connections with national identity and foreign policy

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<sup>25</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims, and Turkish Nationalists; Identity Politics 1908–1938,” In *Ottoman Past and Today’s Turkey*, Ed. Kemal H. Karpat, 150–179 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 172–173.

<sup>26</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism,” *Middle East Critique* 7, iss.12 (1998): 22.



throughout his books: *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*,<sup>27</sup> *The Emergence of a New Turkey*,<sup>28</sup> and *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*,<sup>29</sup>

To summarize the works concerning the Circassian ideologies and organizations in Turkey, Celikpala provides a detailed description of the “United Caucasianism” as an ideology in his PhD thesis.<sup>30</sup> When the revolution of 1917 swept away the old Tsarist Russia, the North Caucasus people of the region tried to create a sovereign confederation in the region. However, the confederation was short lived, and in May of 1919 it dissolved; later, in 1922, the region became part of the Soviet Union. This short-lived attempt is a good example to show the differences in the region, and also in the cultural characteristics of the Caucasian independent people. At the same time, Young Turks were dealing with the uprising led by the Circassian gang leader Ahmet Anzavur in the southern Marmara region of Turkey. However, this attempt did not end successfully, since the wartime policies of the Young Turks exacerbated the economic situation of the deported Circassians. “Poverty, hunger, political alienation, and the fear of extermination a la the Armenians were concerns that defined the mood of many North Caucasian communities along the Marmara region.”<sup>31</sup> The supporters’ desire for autonomy ended with the death or exile of supporters to eastern provinces of Turkey.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> See M. Hakan Yavuz, *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> See M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Mitat Celikpala, “Search for a Common North Caucasian Identity: The Mountaineers” Attempts for Survival and Unity in Response to the Russian Rule. PhD Dissertation (Ankara: Bilkent University, Department of International Relations, 2002), 59–104.

<sup>31</sup> Ryan Gingers, “Notorious Subjects, Invisible Citizens: North Caucasian Resistance to the Turkish National Movement in Northwestern Anatolia, 1919–23.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, no. 1 (2008): 103.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/59813618?accountid=12702>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 104.

Sufian Zhemukhov focuses on the problem of nationalist movements among Circassians all over the world by comparing different approaches of the Circassian people, such as nationalist, sovereigntist, centrist, culturalist, and accommodationalist.<sup>33</sup> This classification is helpful to understand the level of ambition between different groups and organizations in the diaspora and the homeland. For example, some organizations in Turkey, such as Patriots of Circassia, Caucasus Forum, and the Samsun United Caucasus Association, are the supporters of sovereignist movements and usually oppose the culturalist policy of KAFFED toward North Caucasus. Some extremist units, on the other hand, especially in the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, support more nationalist policies on the issue, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union forced ethnic Russians to leave the region gradually.<sup>34</sup>

Walter Richmond describes these movements as divided into two main categories. A Circassian revival began in the 1970s with the creation of two political platforms. The revolutionaries (Devrimciler) believe a socialist revolution in Turkey would be the best option to protect Caucasian peoples' (Circassian, Abkhazian, Chechen, etc.) rights, while the returnist (Dönüşçüler) supported repatriation to North Caucasus. The revolutionists met resistance and eventually lost support with the coup of September 1980, while returnists were still active until the early 1980s.<sup>35</sup>

Celikpala's other work examines the influence of the North Caucasus diaspora in Turkey with a historical perspective.<sup>36</sup> He defines the negative and positive effects of associations and foundations on Turkish foreign policy, and their reactions and expectations from the Turkish government starting from the

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<sup>33</sup> Sufian Zhemukhov, "The Birth of Modern Circassian Nationalism." *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 4 (2012): 503. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1152166568?accountid=12702>.

<sup>34</sup> As Sochi Approaches, Ethnic Russians Continue to Leave the North Caucasus, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=41480&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=d6094a9180658edbac2303ba9e91970d#.UlzBpha5fFI](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41480&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=d6094a9180658edbac2303ba9e91970d#.UlzBpha5fFI).

<sup>35</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 130.

<sup>36</sup> Mitat Celikpala, "From immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (2006): 423–446.

early 1950s and especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He examines the historical creation of Circassian diaspora organizations in Turkey, focusing much of his attention on the Abkhazian case. In the 1990s, The Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee and Caucasus-Chechen Solidarity Committee played more of an active role to shape Turkish foreign policy with the outbreak of the Abkhazian War and Chechen Wars.<sup>37</sup> These organizations provided policy papers to high officials before their visits to the region. Moreover, the provocative declarations of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) members were striking compared to the current situation in Turkey. In 1995, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Karayalçın, said that, “We have family relations with Chechnya. For this reason we can’t see this problem as an internal problem of another country.”<sup>38</sup> Also in the same manner, the head of the TNGA Husamettin Cindoruk declared that, “If the Caucasus is Russia’s back garden it is also Turkey’s front garden.”<sup>39</sup> Despite these supportive declarations, Turkey has supported the territorial integrity of the region. Celikpala’s work about the organizations until 2006 brought a different perspective of an ethnic minorities’ contribution to state policy; however, the direct link, or the creation of a common idea to influence state policy, is not clearly mentioned in his work. Also, he mostly writes about the Abkhazian case and mentions little about the other North Caucasus groups.

Lars Funch Hansen’s article tells us about the renewed ethnic mobilization among Circassians in the North Caucasus region that has emerged since the second half of the 2000s.<sup>40</sup> His article describes the establishment of new civil society organizations and Internet-based groups in North Caucasus. A similar trend is found among associations and individually published web pages, mostly based on cultural figures in Turkey. He discusses the increase of youth activism

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<sup>37</sup> Celikpala, “From Immigrants to Diaspora,” 432–437.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 438.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 438.

<sup>40</sup> Lars Funch Hansen, “Renewed Circassian Mobilization in the North Caucasus 20-Years After the Fall of the Soviet Union.” *JEMIE - Journal on Ethno politics and Minority Issues in Europe* 11, no. 2 (2012): 103.

in the Caucasus, especially on social media. This mobilization is not just ethnic and the promotion of ethnic separation in the region, but cultural, indigenous, and minority rights related with goals to get more attention from homeland and diaspora. The upcoming 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi has played an important role to increase support among Circassians to force Russia to recognize the nineteenth century exile as an act of genocide. In this respect, international events, such as the Sochi Olympics, are a great opportunity for the Caucasus peoples to create more radical or politicized understanding about their situation. While describing increased activism in the region, Hansen fails to show the importance of the organization's role for shaping society and forcing society to shape state politics.

Alexandre Toumarkine, Erol Taymaz, and Ayhan Kaya have studied the structures, policies, and activism of Circassian organizations in Turkey. Toumarkine undertakes a comparative analysis of North Caucasian and Balkan organizations, and underlines the differences between these two groups in terms of ideology and relations with the Turkish state.<sup>41</sup> Also, he separates North Caucasus organizations from Kurd and Alevi organizations with their loyalty to the Turkish state and pan-Turkist ideology. Furthermore, with democratic changes in the state structure since 2001, there has been a significant change in Ankara towards non-Turkish organizations. Government officials now increasingly designate non-Turkish communities in Turkey as “brother” communities. In spite of his insightful comments on the creation of the organizations in Turkey from a historical and ideological perspective, he does not specifically examine North Caucasus organizations and their relationships with the Turkish state. Considering the time in which the article was written, and the many changes that have taken place since then, there is a need to examine the political roles of North Caucasian organizations more deeply and critically.

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<sup>41</sup> Alexandre Toumarkine, “Balkan and Caucasian Immigrant Associations: Community and Politics.” In *Türkiye’de Sivil Toplum ve Milliyetçilik* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 425–450.

Erol Taymaz examines the historical evolution of the North Caucasian organizations between 1908 and 2001.<sup>42</sup> After examining the historical background of these organizations, he posits an optimistic portrayal about the efforts of these organizations and their possible contribution to Turkey's accession to the European Union. Cultural influences of the organization and their role to preserve ethnic identity are the main topics of his article, with little mentioning of returnist policies in the 1970s. However, Ayhan Kaya's book *Turkiye'deki Cerkesler* carries a survey that shows the dominant idea of returnist policy to homeland, although most of them have not been in the region and with no clear information about the region. Moreover, he does not mention United Caucasianism and Islamic activism in Circassian organizations—especially *Kafkas Vakfi*—as a different perspective.

Ayhan Kaya identifies the effect of globalization on the different political strategies within the Circassian community before 2004.<sup>43</sup> He defines the changing structure of Circassian politics from the perspective of minority politics under Turkification policies to diasporic structure after the early 1990s. He bases his analysis of the Circassian diaspora movement on Patrick R. Ireland's *Institutional Channeling Theory*, which is an alternative theory of ethnic and race-based dichotomies. According to Ayhan Kaya, Circassian organizations can be understood as a “non-ethnic” social movement until the 1990s, since the names of the organizations reflect regional ties rather than ethnic. However, the role of the organizations under this theory is not explored very clearly. He associates all North Caucasian people under the Circassian name (including Chechens, Dagestanis, and others) and uses Circassian as an umbrella term for all North Caucasian deportees in Turkey, as do United Caucasianists.

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<sup>42</sup> Erol Taymaz, “Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri-North Caucasus Associations,” In *Turkiye'de Sivil Toplum ve Milliyetçilik* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 451–460.

<sup>43</sup> Ayhan Kaya, “Political Participation Strategies of the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey.” *Mediterranean Politics* 9, No. 2 (2004): 221.

In another study, Ayhan Kaya examines minority–majority relations in the framework of the production of the other nationalities in Turkey.<sup>44</sup> He describes contemporary diaspora identities and how identities differentiate diaspora formations. He asserts that contemporary diasporas are found into two main pillars: modern communicative circuitry, and acts of exclusion by receiving societies. He claims that Circassians in Turkey created distinct cultural identities, depending on how they were recognized by their neighbors and by the state. Cultural activities become the main practice of the diaspora group taking them away from the misunderstandings and prejudices that may cause their exclusion from the public.

When Turkey changed its official policy towards the Chechens and implemented a rapprochement strategy with Russia intensifying economic and political relations, Circassian organizations in Turkey withdrew their support partly to Chechens, so as not to conflict with official state policy. Also, after the rise of common opposition to fundamentalist Islam—especially in Chechnya—Circassian associations, such as KAFDER (later KAFFED), and the Circassian Democratic Platform started underlining their secular characters.<sup>45</sup> He defines the importance of the culture for the creation of diasporic identity in two perspectives. First, it is a way of dealing with the conditions without engaging state law. Second, it serves the regeneration of the self within the community that provides a ground for further activities.

## **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

This thesis will discuss Circassian history and their different political movements in their homeland and in the diaspora. It will follow a historical path and, in the organizations part, the hypothesis is based on historical theories about Circassian movements in Turkey. In this part, Kafkas Dernekleri

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<sup>44</sup> Ayhan Kaya, “Cultural Reification in Circassian Diaspora: Stereotypes, Prejudices and Ethnic Relations.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005): 129.

<sup>45</sup> Kaya, “Cultural Reification in Circassian Diaspora,” 143.

Federasyonu-KAFFED and Circassian Trust (CT) or Circassian Foundation (Kafkas Vakfi), and the other organizations and groups in Turkey will be examined in a historical concept and ideological perspective.

The historical dimension of this thesis will be based on secondary sources, such as books and articles both in English and Turkish, as well as some primary sources, such as memoirs (David Urquhart, Evliya Celebi, J. Longworth, Edmund Spencer), and the latest revealed Ottoman Archives (Osmanli Belgelerinde Kafkas Gocleri-I ve II). The second part of this thesis will also include electronic sources and newspaper articles about contemporary events in Turkish history concerning the Circassians.

## **F. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis will examine the Circassian exile and Circassian organizations in Turkish history. The first chapter will start with the definition of Circassian people, their culture, religion, language, as well as the literature about Circassians.

Chapter II will briefly introduce Circassian history from pre-historic times to the modern Turkish Republic. In this part, the author will specifically point out Russian rule in Caucasus and the difficulties that the Circassian people faced. The exile of 1864 is not a well-known situation in the world. While even less violent activities are recognized by many organizations as genocide or a human rights violation, the Circassian issue still is not a well-known issue, despite deaths and losses reaching millions.

Chapter III will cover identity politics in the late Ottoman era and the Republic of Turkey, and the change of Circassian identity politics during these periods. This chapter will discuss how the Ottoman Empire and Turkey applied different policies to bind the people together and aimed to survive the wellbeing of state and their methods.

Chapter IV will cover the role of formal Circassian associations with Turkish political life and their influence over the diaspora group in Turkey. The contemporary structure of Circassian organizations and their activities to rejuvenate the Circassian identity in Turkey will be investigated.

## **G. WHO ARE THE CIRCASSIANS?**

The term Circassians, the English equivalent of the Turkish version “Cherkess or Cerkes” denotes all or part of the indigenous people of the Caucasus region who live at the north side of the Caucasus Mountains, which divides the North Caucasus Autonomous regions from Transcaucasia, where three independent countries continue their sovereignty.

There is no clear agreement as to whom, exactly, those nations refer. There are three basic denotations widely used. First, the most comprehensive denotation includes all the natives of the North Caucasus region. The more specific denotation excludes the Northeast Caucasus people and encompasses the Northwestern Caucasians: The Adyges, Abkhaz-Abazas, and Ubykhs and other minor northwest communities. The most restrictive definition refers only to the Adyges, who are composed of many tribes and speak mutually intelligible dialects that make up Adygabze, the Circassian language. Adyge and Circassian(s) will be used interchangeably in this thesis (Adyge refers to the self-designation of the people and Circassian is used generally by outsiders). In Turkey, Cherkess (Cerkes) is used to reference all descendants of the peoples who came from North Caucasus during the nineteenth century and afterwards.

### **1. People and Country**

Throughout history, the North Caucasus has been a refuge for many disparate groups trying to escape from the dominance of different states, especially the three big empires: The Russians, the Ottomans, and the Persians. This region is an important stronghold for them and the power struggle to control the region has been an important issue. Thus, boundaries between various local tribes and ethnic groups have stayed unclear and continuously changing. The



historical homeland of the Circassians is located in the NW Caucasus region. Although its boundaries are not clear, in the course of history it is possible to delineate historical Circassia before the Russian-Caucasian War during the eighteenth century. Its boundaries encompassed the land between the Black Sea to the west, the river Sunzha to the east, the Caucasus Mountains to the south, the steppes north of the Kuban, and the Pyatigorsk plains to the north.<sup>46</sup>

The Circassians, together with the genetically and linguistically related Abkhazians of Abkhazia, Abazins of the Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia, and the nearly extinct community of Ubykh, made up the indigenous population of the NW Caucasus. However, their languages were not mutually intelligible. The Adige were by far the largest nation of the NW Caucasus before their exile to Ottoman lands, and composed of many tribes: in the eastern part Kabardins and Beslanays; in the western part Abzakh, Shapsugh, Bzhedugh, Nartkhuaj, Kemirgoi and Hatuqwey.<sup>47</sup> The Shapsugh also had their national area within the borders of Krasnodar Region until its abolition in 1945.<sup>48</sup>

## **2. Demography**

There is no clear estimate for the current population of the region, yet reliable estimates put the total number at more than 800,000.<sup>49</sup> According to the Russian 2010 census, 719,000 Circassians live in North Caucasus: 516,826 were registered as Kabardian, 124,835 as Adygheyan, 73,184 as Cherkess, and 3,882 as Shapsugh.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to establish the exact numbers of Circassians living outside of the Caucasus, since they suffered many deportations as consequences of state policies and war. Various estimates give different figures for the size of the Circassian community in Turkey, which is the largest in the

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<sup>46</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>50</sup> The official results of the 2010 All-Russia Population Census can be reached at [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus\\_nac\\_10.php](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_nac_10.php) (Accessed 16 October 2013).

world. However, 3 to 7 million Circassian descendants live in many cities and nearly 900 villages spread throughout the country.<sup>51</sup>

There is a significant number of Circassians living in Syria (100,000),<sup>52</sup> Jordan (111,000),<sup>53</sup> Iraq (30,000),<sup>54</sup> and Israel (over 4,000).<sup>55</sup> Secondary diaspora communities are also found in the United States (around 9,000), and in Western Europe, especially in Germany and the Netherlands (around 40,000).<sup>56</sup>

The Karachay-Cherkessia Republic was first established as an autonomous oblast in 1923, and transformed to the republic in 1993. It encompassed only 0.3 percent of Russia's overall population. There are Russians (40 percent of the population); the Karachai, an indigenous ethnic Turkic group (36 percent of the population); The Circassians (9.7 percent of the population); and Nogais, a Mongolic ethnic group (3.1 percent of the population).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The Caucasus Trust (CT) and the Federation of the Caucasus Associations (KAFFED), the two of the most prominent Caucasian organizations in Turkey, give the figure of seven million for the number of people in Turkey with Caucasian ancestry with the majority of them being Circassian (Caucasus Trust, n.d.). A prominent researcher speaks of two to three million Circassians (Papsu, 2005), *Nart Ajans*, [http://www.nartajans.net/site/haberler\\_5573\\_turkiye\\_deki\\_cerkes\\_koyleri.html](http://www.nartajans.net/site/haberler_5573_turkiye_deki_cerkes_koyleri.html).

<sup>52</sup> Moshe Gammer, *The Caspian Region: The Caucasus* (Routledge, 2004), 64 ; Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (Ortadogu Stratejic Arastirmalar Merkezi-ORSAM), "Syrian Circassians," ORSAM Report No: 130 (2012): 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ethnic People Groups of Jordon," Joshua Project, accessed on 15 October 2013, <http://www.joshuaproject.net/countries.php?rog3=JO>.

<sup>54</sup> Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (Ortadogu Stratejic Arastirmalar Merkezi-ORSAM), "Iraqi Circassians," Report No: 134 (2012): 10.

<sup>55</sup> Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (Ortadogu Stratejic Arastirmalar Merkezi-ORSAM), "Israeli Circassians," accessed on 15 October 2013, <http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/yazigoster.aspx?ID=3852>

<sup>56</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://www.unpo.org/members/7869>.

<sup>57</sup> Glen E. Howard, *Volatile Borderland: Russia and the North Caucasus* (Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2012), 299–308.

Kabardino-Balkaria is a federated republic and a component part of the Russian Federation. According to the census of 2002, there are about 500,000 Kabardin, 225,000 Russians, and 100,000 Balkars, another ethnic Turkic group, residing in the republic.<sup>58</sup>

The autonomous Republic of Adyge is situated in southern Russia on the northern foothills of the Caucasus Mountain range, and the Krasnodar Region of Russia encompasses the republic, which is populated mostly by Russian citizens. Over 80 ethnic groups live in the republic, yet three major groups make up the majority of the population: 64.5 percent Russian, 24.2 percent Adyge, and 3.4 percent Armenians.<sup>59</sup>

### **3. Language**

Some linguistic research suggests that more than 5,000 years ago all Northwest Caucasians spoke proto-west Caucasian. However, because of geographical differences the original language divided into three basic categories. Circassian is one of the three basic groups of the North West Caucasian language group, the other two being Abkhaz-Abaza language, and the extinct Ubykh language.<sup>60</sup>

The Circassian language has many dialects, which can be categorized into two mutually intelligible groups called the western and eastern dialects. Shapsugh, Temirgoi, Bzhedugh, Abzakh, Hatuqwey and many other dialects are part of the Western Circassian group, whereas Besleney and Kabardin are part of eastern Circassian. These particular dialects also have many sub-dialects.<sup>61</sup>

Another language group in the Caucasus is South Caucasian or Kartvelian: Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan, Adjar, and Laz, all of which are spoken by about 4.5 million people in Transcaucasia. Some linguists dispute the

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<sup>58</sup> Howard, *Volatile Borderland*, 310.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>60</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 245.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 246.

existence of any genetic link between North and South Caucasian, and for many specialists suggested links between the Caucasus languages and other languages spoken around the region are open to serious doubt.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4. Religion

The Circassian approach to religion was also quite different. Religion was centered on polytheism, paganism, and animism with some Christian and Muslim influence until the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> After the nineteenth century, Circassians were caught in the middle of a power struggle between Orthodox Russia and Muslim Turkey to convert to either Christianity or Islam. This was met with only superficial success. The true “religion” of the Circassians was and still is to some degree Adygage, which translates as “to be Adyge.” The main principles of Adygage are the memory of ancestors, consciousness of Circassia as the home of those ancestors, and tolerance of other ways of life and religious beliefs. The practical manifestation of Adygage was the Circassians’ legal–ethical code by which they regulated their society, “Adyge Habze (or Xabze).”<sup>64</sup>

Circassians are nominally Sunni Muslims. There is a small Christian community in Mozdok in North Ossetia. The two most powerful forms of the Circassian system of beliefs are the ancient animistic-pagan religion, and the code of conduct, *Adige Xabze*, which also has regulated mundane life. Religious persecution during the Soviet period and great attachment to traditions, a characteristic of the Circassians, has resulted in a superficial knowledge and practice of religion. There is no tradition of religious fanaticism.

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<sup>62</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 246.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>64</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 6.

## 5. Socio-Political Structure

The social structure of the northwest Caucasus was a mixture of a feudal, clan-based, semi-democratic societies, and slavery. According to the Circassian traditional social structure<sup>65</sup> there was a prince (or Pshi) at the top of the pyramid. Below the Pshi, there were vassals forming the lesser nobility called “uork.” Below uork, there were free peasants, and at the lower level there were slaves, the “azat.”<sup>66</sup> However, with the arrival of Imam Shamil’s deputy, Muhammed Emin in the Abzakh region, Islam separated in the Abzakh and Shapsugh regions and later influenced the conversion of the socio-political structure from a feudal version to a more egalitarian system throughout the region.<sup>67</sup> Thus, egalitarian and feudal structures continued in the region for a while. The feudal system came to an end when Russian forces started to conquer Circassia, and the Tsar issued an edict prohibiting slavery on 31 July 1864.<sup>68</sup> Although the end of slavery in diaspora is not known clearly, there are records showing that it continued many years in the Ottoman lands among the Circassians.<sup>69</sup>

The geography of the northwest Caucasus has had a tremendous impact upon the evolution of society in the region. Restrictions of travel and communication have impeded the integration of the numerous tribes and ethnic groups into a larger political structure. Different tribes emerged from the division of groups within themselves. The Besleney tribe, created when a clan broke off from the Kabardians, lived to the west. In similar fashion, the Temirgoys broke from the Besleneys to become a separate tribe, and the Hatukays broke from the Temirgoys. Some tribes, such as the Mahosh, Hamysh, Bjedukh, and

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<sup>65</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 157.

<sup>66</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 164.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 169.

Cherchenay, developed independently from the Kabardians, and possessed similar, but weaker aristocratic hierarchies.<sup>70</sup>

In terms of the political structure, the government was the institution of popular assembly in east and west parts of the region, called the *Hase (Xase)*, a rudimentary form of congress at which hundreds of “delegates” would assemble. Another assembly, the *zafes*, was called less frequently and dealt with more critical issues. Both the *hase* and *zafes* suffered from several shortcomings, such as a lack of organization, unity, enforcement mechanism in assemblies and wisdom that turned out to be fatal in the war with Russia.<sup>71</sup> Under these assemblies, peasants owned their own lands yet paid tribute to the princely families, who, in turn extracted the services of the lesser nobility to provide protection for the villages and settlements of the former.

Traditional Circassian society was martial in nature and the offspring of the upper-classes were required to go through a very harsh training regime. The code of chivalry had respect for women and elders, hospitality and blood-revenge as its trinity. Avoidance customs, as when a man, wife, and siblings are proscribed from associating in public, were manifestations of the severity of social relations. Women, especially of the upper class, enjoyed a relatively high social status. The position of Circassian women is significantly better in many respects than the Russian average.

## **6. Xabze (Habze)**

Circassian culture, tradition and codes of behavior always prioritized elders over younger generations. This is known as the unwritten code of conduct of Circassian tradition (*xabze*), and is still one of the most important aspects of Circassian identity and way of life. This unwritten traditional conduct regulated military affairs, communal courts, crime and punishment, blood-feuds, the interaction between social classes, marriage, sexuality, and gender-relations. It

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<sup>70</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 6.

also required that some qualities included the love of fatherland and its defense to the last, idolization of honor, bravery and concomitant abhorrence of cowardice, observance of the code of chivalry, loathing of oppression, loyalty to the clan and kin, fealty to bonds of comradery, care and fidelity to one's horse.<sup>72</sup>

Reverence for age was one of the basic requirements of the *Xabze* alongside the concept of respect to the *Thamede*, who had shown leadership qualities in war, in peace, and managed to combine mature age and wisdom in their personalities. Another important communal characteristic of tradition is the Circassian concept of hospitality: Anyone who turned up on a Circassian's doorstep was treated like one of the family. This was most likely a result of necessity; the traveler, hungry and exhausted from the trials of mountain travel, could count on safe harbor at any household he came across.<sup>73</sup>

While the *Xabze* has changed under the influence of many forces in diaspora and has adopted the local traditions of the superior nation, the observance of various aspects of it is still acknowledged by almost all Circassian communities around the world; *Xabze* meetings, respect to *thamades*, wedding ceremonies, seating arrangements in large meetings among the Circassians, conduct of funerals according to the Circassian tradition, and many other notions of culture have survived in diaspora.

## **7. Economy**

Despite the upheavals that have rocked the economy of the region since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Northwest Caucasus remains relatively peaceful and a stable economic structure. However, it could be better when stereotypes about the region are gone and foreign investors start to inject their money into the region.

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<sup>72</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 172.

<sup>73</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 5.

Throughout their history, trade played an important role in the economy of the Northwest Caucasus. The products of the fertile soil and mild climate of the region were traded at the coastal towns of the region. There was also a slave trade, which contributed to the economy and which was, until the Russian conquests, quite common in the region.<sup>74</sup> Raising farm stock is a principal economic activity. Horse breeding, especially in Kabarda, has thrived as an economic activity with the export of these special horses to various countries. These horses became a part of Russian cavalry units after the Russian conquest.

The Soviet period was characterized by centralization of the economy and the policies after the 1920s, based on nationalization and collectivization that destroyed many traditional economic activities. The post-World War II period was characterized as the stability and stagnation era until Gorbachev's dual concept of perestroika and glasnost, which ignited hopes of private ownership and a market economy. However, the situation deteriorated in Caucasus. Being heavily dependent on federal subsidies, the region had a hard time reviving its economy. By the end of 1993, the Kabardino-Balkaria and Adige republics were classified as "depressed nations," while Karachay-Cherkessia was defined as a "stagnant economy."<sup>75</sup> Although Russian cash flow dried up during the Chechen conflict, which turned to a full war in December of 1994, Russian economic support to the region has continued, which has created huge demonstrations in the country in recent years.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 124.

<sup>75</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 128.

<sup>76</sup> North Caucasus Leaders Reject Criticism of Budget Spending, accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/northcaucasus-budget-spending/25083917.html>.



## **II. A SHORT CIRCASSIAN HISTORY**

The Circassians that refer to themselves as Adyge are the indigenous people of the Northwest Caucasus region. Throughout history they were composed of many tribes and clans, each of whom had a different dialect, traditions, and folklore. The Caucasian people, primarily the people known as Circassians and Abkhazians, are not Turks, yet they share common religious bonds with Turks as a predominantly Sunni Muslim population. Most Circassians are Sunni Muslims, though remnants of earlier Animism and Christianity were strong until the eighteenth century, when Muslim emissaries from Crimea were able to spread Islam in the region.<sup>77</sup> However, there are still Christian elements in the region, coming from Greek Byzantium influence between the fourth and sixth centuries and Georgian influence between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.

Since the beginning of their history, they lived on their lands in a tribal or clan structure and organized their societies according to their traditions and customs. Circassians were forced to leave their homelands by Russian armies, and they first became part of the Ottoman population, and later the Turkish Republic. Using the term Circassian as a historical category of identification, this chapter's goal is to explore the history of Circassians in general, and explore the factors that contribute to the creation of Circassian identity in the later phase, specifically the relations between the Circassians and the state, and their view of the state starting from the medieval ages to the contemporary status of the nation.

### **A. FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> MILLENIUM BC TO 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

Circassians have been known throughout their history, yet the first referrals to them date back to the first millennium BC. Civilizations attributable to

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<sup>77</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 123–171.

the ancestors of Circassians can be traced back to the third millennium BC.<sup>78</sup> The first bearers of the population were aboriginals in the Caucasus, who crossed the Don at the time of great Sarmatian Migration, together with the Ants, Zikhis (Kissis), Chorvats, Vals, and other small tribes.<sup>79</sup> They coexisted with the Slavs and established primitive tribal organizations. From the seventh century BC, the Greeks developed a colonial empire along the shore of the Black Sea and maintained contact with the locals. The evidence of Greek archeological reports suggests that the ancestors of present day Circassians formed similar strategic settlement patterns stretching from the Taman Peninsula to the river Laba.<sup>80</sup> Later, the Kaskians, who had connections with the Hattians, formed a conglomeration of martial tribes that lived in the northern part of the Hattian lands, and it was suggested that they came from the Caucasus about 3,800 years before.<sup>81</sup>

In the early first millennium BC, Cimmerians, ancestors of Alans and Ossetians, occupied the central part of the Caucasus. Later, between the seventh and fourth centuries, Maeotian-Scythian tribes lived in the region. In 480 BC, the Greeks established the Bosporan Kingdom in the Eastern Crimea, and starting from 438 BC the kingdom pushed eastward and subjugated the Maeotians and Sinds.<sup>82</sup> Subsequently, Zyghoys settled in the Caucasus starting from 64 AD;<sup>83</sup> in the third century, Goths established a state in the Northwest Caucasus. The Huns invaded the region in 374 AD. This caused the Maeotians to remove to the safety of the mountains, but those on the Black Sea's coast were undisturbed.<sup>84</sup> In the fourth century AD, Christianity was introduced with the Byzantine Empire's rule in the region.

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<sup>78</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 45.

There is a lack of clear reference to Circassians from the seventh to tenth centuries. Circassian groups began to take more modern shape as a coherent coalition of kindred tribes and clans during the tenth century AD.<sup>85</sup> During the tenth century, Abkhazians and Zkhis lived on the coastal side of the Black Sea, and Papaghis and Kasakhs lived in the hinterlands. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Russians took part in the routing of the Khazar to cross the Taman Peninsula.<sup>86</sup>

## **B. THE RUSSIAN-CIRCASSIAN WAR TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION**

At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Northwest Caucasus was not formally a part of any state in the region. Gradually, the North Caucasus became the center of imperial competition between Russian and Ottoman forces. The Ottomans did not deal directly with the Circassians, and used the Crimean Tatars after completing the subjugation of Crimean lands by 1475.<sup>87</sup> The Crimean Khanate collected tribute on behalf of the Ottoman Empire and generally left them untouched in the region. During that time, Northwest Caucasus tribes were scattered in the area without a sovereign structure; however, in the eastern part of the North Caucasus Prince Inal and his successor Idar established a more democratic state structure and ruled the region. In 1519, Kabarda accepted the suzerainty of the Crimean Khanate and accepted to pay tribute after many attacks of the Crimeans.<sup>88</sup> Upon Crimean domination, Temruk, son of Idar, offered his symbolic submission to the Russian Tsar to become the Great Prince of Kabarda and married his daughter to the Tsar Ivan the Terrible.

After destroying the Empire of the Golden Horde at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Russia began to push south towards the northern steppes of the Caucasus. During that same century, Cossacks made their first appearance in the region. Initial good relations between Cossacks, who settled in the steppes of

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<sup>85</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>87</sup> Richmond, *The Northwest Caucasus*, 38.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

the river Sunzha and Terek, and the peoples of the North Caucasus grew more sour during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1712, The Terek Cossacks submitted to Peter the Great and became part of Russian expansionist policy.<sup>89</sup> Russia's rulers grew more antagonistic towards the North Caucasus after 1557 and eventually set out to conquer the region.<sup>90</sup> In 1736, a war broke out between Russia and the Ottoman Empire due to a dispute over Kabarda. The war was settled by the independence of Kabarda guaranteed with the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739. However, the actual effect of the treaty was to leave Kabarda completely defenseless and vulnerable against aggression from both sides.<sup>91</sup>

Russian pressure increased in Caucasus after a relaxation of the European front with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1763. Once Catherine the Great decided to invade the northeastern shores of the Black Sea in the 1760s, the Russian military worked to expel Circassians from the region bit-by-bit until they were surrounded in the high mountains.<sup>92</sup> After the second war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1768, the Ottomans were forced to cede Crimea and North Caucasus to Russia after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. In 1779 Empress Catherine instructed the Governor General of Astrakhan, Prince Potemkin, to pacify Kabarda by fair means or foul. After the Kabardan Army was defeated by Russian forces in 1779, Russian rule began to take root in Kabarda. The situation became worse when Russian troops occupied Kuban in 1781 and Crimea in 1784.<sup>93</sup>

The mythical warrior, Sheikh Mansur made his first mark on the history of the North Caucasus in 1785. He was a Chechen follower of the Naqshabandi brand of Sufism, and according to written history he was the first leader who considered a united North Caucasian front against Tsarist Russia. He fought against Russian rule with North Caucasian troops and in coordination with

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<sup>89</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 11.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 61.

attacks by the Ottoman military. However, according to one account, he was imprisoned in a fortress in 1791 where he died three years after.<sup>94</sup>

By 1801, the Russians reduced Georgia to a protectorate and formed a vice around the North Caucasus tribes, which sealed the fate of Circassians. Eventually, Russia increased its authority in the region, and in 1810 conducted a campaign in which many Circassians were killed, and approximately 200 Circassian villages were burned.<sup>95</sup>

In the following years, Circassian attempts to reacquire previous territories were conducted, but Russian troops were able to suppress them each time by killing many North Caucasian people, and by burning their villages. Kabardins suffered much from these attacks and their numbers fell from 350,000 in the 1770s to a mere 50,000 in 1818.<sup>96</sup> The title of the great Prince of Kabarda was abolished in 1822, and Russian pressure in the region increased through 1825. During this time period many Kabardin immigrated to western Caucasus and continued their war against Russian forces. Although Russian forces subjugated Kabarda, Kabardans searched for allies to continue their fight instead of accepting defeat. Thus, they maintained contact with Shamil.

The religious and mystical Sufi sect of Islam was a widespread belief in the Northern Caucasus at the end of the eighteen-century with the leadership of Imam Mansur, Gazi Muhammed, Hamzat-bek, and Shaykh Shamil. They believed that the jihad (fight against the enemy of Islam) would contribute to the creation of an independent Caucasus. Imam Mansur managed to unite a significant amount of Circassians, especially the Chechens and Dagestanis, under the idea of a Motherland and religion until in 1791 when he was taken as a prisoner by the Russians. Later in 1794, Imam Gazi Muhammed organized another resistance under the name of *Gazavat*, the synonym of jihad, and this movement was carried on by Hamzat and Shamil. In 1834, Shamil was chosen

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<sup>94</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 61.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 63.

as the leader of this movement and became the symbol of Circassian resistance until his imprisonment on 6 September 1859.<sup>97</sup>

After the defeat of Ottoman forces during the Russo-Ottoman Battle of 1828–29, the treaty of Adrianople, in 1829, forced Ottoman troops to leave their forts on the Circassian coast of the Black Sea. Article 4 of the treaty contained the following stipulation: “All the coast of the Black Sea from the mouth of the Kuban to the wharf of Saint Nikolai inclusive shall enter into the permanent possession of the Russian Empire.”<sup>98</sup> Thereafter, Russia embarked on a vicious war of attrition, which caused the fierce resistance of Circassians for 35 years. As a part of their strategy, Russia, on one hand made attempts to co-opt the Circassian elite, and on the other hand, used brute force tactics to subdue Circassians, which hardened the resolve of the hearty Adige.<sup>99</sup>

Circassia was never part of Ottoman territory. When Russian pressure increased in the region and Russia demanded Circassians recognize its rule over the region; Circassians rejected. Starting from the 1830s onwards, tensions and fights between Circassian Units and Cossacks increased. In 1835, General Velyaminov, at the head of 12,000 Russian forces, led a bloody campaign against Circassians and Abkhazians that resulted with the deaths of many locals.<sup>100</sup>

The looming shadow of Russia and its gradual encroachment into Circassian territory convinced many Circassians of the importance of tribal solidarity. British envoys were influential, especially Urquhart, with fostering the unity of tribes. North Caucasians established a federation that included twelve tribes, and this attempt of cooperation and optimism culminated in their declaration of independence; Circassia became a landmark in Circassian history.

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<sup>97</sup> Akdogan, “The Roots of Circassian/Chechen Identity in Turkey,” 15–16.

<sup>98</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 34.

<sup>99</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 64.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 64.

This declaration was published in 1836 in a British Journal closely associated with the British government. In 1838, England recognized the independence of Circassia.<sup>101</sup>

### **C. THE WAY TO 1864, AND THE FINAL BATTLE**

When the Caucasus became the subject of clashes between the Ottoman Empire and tsarist Russia, the immigration of Circassians to Ottoman lands in great numbers, called the “Great Exile” by Circassians, took place after the Crimean War (1853–1856) at the peak of Russian expansionist policy.

The year 1840 was an important milestone in the history of Circassians. Struck by famine and harsh conditions of winter, and surrounded by a Russian cordon, western Circassians found themselves in a corner. Feeling that they had nothing to lose, they resolved to mount concerted attacks at Russian forts to break the stranglehold. Initially, they gained some of the forts by the southern coast of the Black Sea; however, Russian counter-offensives took the forts back and razed thirteen Shapsugh villages to the ground as revenge for this attempt.<sup>102</sup>

From 1840, Imam Shamil tried to organize a unity among all Circassians in the North Caucasus. On one hand, he attacked Russian forces on the western front; on the other hand, he sent envoys to the Kabardins to organize unity in the region. However, effective cooperation between the two flanks of the North Caucasus was never obtained. The Russians were aware of Circassian indifference to Sufism and the disinclination of many of them to join forces with Shamil to organize unified attacks. Therefore, Russians lived in the luxury of being able to concentrate their attacks on one front without compromising their position on the other.

The Crimean War of 1853–1856 created great hope for Circassians that Western powers, especially England, would intervene on their behalf and deliver

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<sup>101</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 64.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 65.

them from the claws of Russia. The expectation reached its peak after the Russian defeat; however, at the negotiations Russians managed to buy off the Ottomans and secure a free hand in the Northwest Caucasus. The fate of the North Caucasus was entrusted to the delicate care of Russians with the approval of the Western Powers. The only gain for Circassians from the Crimean War was that they were spared Russian aggression for three years, while Russia turned to vengeance on the mountaineers, whose morale had reached its nadir.<sup>103</sup>

The flight from the Caucasus started during the 1820s on a small scale and gained speed during the early 1860s. A campaign of Russification and Christianization began in 1843, when the “Caucasus Spiritual Consistory” was created in Stavropol and started to sever the cultural and religious ties of the region with the Ottomans.<sup>104</sup> Within the atmosphere of Russian pressure, Circassians had no chance to flee “to escape the forced sedentarization and Christianization programs of the Tsarist Russia.”<sup>105</sup> Immigration reached its peak during the mid-1860s after Russia issued a decree commanding Circassians to abandon their homelands.

In 1859, after a bitter guerilla war that lasted thirty years, Shamil surrendered after the capture of the mountainous stronghold of Gunib.<sup>106</sup> After this cessation, Russian forces in Chechnya turned westward. In 1861, the western tribes of the Caucasus organized a national meeting in Sochi to construct a civilian administration to fight against Russian forces. First, they sent a delegation to England to seek help. However, the British government realized that there was no way to stop Russian forces. They left the Circassians to their fate, despite their numerous attempts to influence the region in line with British interests. The final pacification of the Northern Caucasus and the great exodus of

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<sup>103</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 67.

<sup>104</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 139.

<sup>105</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 32.

<sup>106</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 67.



locals came in 1864. Finally, Russia was able to crush eastern Circassians in 1859, and then the western Circassians in 1864.<sup>107</sup>

#### **D. RUSSIAN CONQUEST OF CIRCASSIANS**

The Russians organized a lethal combination of attacks on the North Caucasus. The new and more effective methods included the wholesale destruction of villages and crops in the region. Many clans and tribes were forced to resettle in more tractable and vulnerable areas. Some researchers defined this stage of war as nothing less than organized genocide, according to the UN convention on genocide definition.<sup>108</sup>

At the end of the 1850s, the Russian government started to create legal grounds for forced immigration to prepare a consensus with the Ottoman Empire. At the meeting in 1859 between the Russian envoy and the Ottoman government, the Ottoman government requested a limitation of immigrations to Ottoman lands due to a lack of sufficient places to locate them and the organizations to handle the immigration in a moderate fashion.<sup>109</sup>

In 1860, Brigadier General Loris Melikov, representing the Russian government, was sent to Istanbul to make an agreement with the Ottoman government for the emigration of up to 40–50,000 Circassians onto Ottoman lands.<sup>110</sup> It seems that the Ottoman government made some preparations to organize the immigration to Ottoman lands upon this agreement. For example, on 31 January 1861, the governor of the Salonika (Thessaloniki) Husnu urged the local administration to identify suitable ports near local settlements and not to spend much time at the ports where the Circassians would arrive, according to the directives of the Ottoman state.<sup>111</sup> However, the number of refugees that

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>108</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 28.

<sup>109</sup> Avangyan, *Cerkesler*, 41.

<sup>110</sup> Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 67.

<sup>111</sup> Basbakanlik Devlet Arsivleri Genel Mudurlugu, Osmanli Belgelerinde Kafkas Gocleri, "Selanik'te Belirlenen Iskelelere Muhacirlerin Cikarilmasi (To put the Immigrants to Defined Piers in Seloniki)," 52.

reached the Ottoman ports were around 80,000 by 1863, according to reports from the Commission of General Administration of Immigrants (Idare-i Umumiye-i Muhacirin Komisyonu), which was higher than the expectations and capabilities of the Empire.<sup>112</sup> An Ottoman state report dated 12 May 1861 mentioned the total number of immigrants from the Caucasus and Crimea as being around 150,000, and defined the measures that were taken by local authorities concerning the requirements of the immigrants.<sup>113</sup> More tragically, the number of immigrants during the spring of 1864 alone was nearly 400,000.<sup>114</sup>

On 14 April 1864, Prince Mikhail met with leaders of the western Caucasus in Sochi and ordered them to leave the high mountains to settle in the plains. He gave those who refused to leave for Ottoman lands one month to emigrate, or otherwise be treated like war prisoners. Covertly, Russians started an organized and systematic campaign where all villagers were forced to leave and their properties were burned to the ground. Seeing Russian brutality, Circassians decided to immigrate to Muslim Ottoman lands, instead of accepting the Russians' order. On 21 May 1864, Prince Mikhail proclaimed the end of the Caucasus War. Russian officer Ivan Drozdov described the scene around Sochi while the Russians were celebrating: "On the road our eyes were met with a staggering image: corpses of women, children, and elderly persons, torn to pieces and half-eaten by dogs; deportees emaciated by hunger and disease, almost too weak to move their legs, collapsing from exhaustion and becoming prey to dogs while still alive."<sup>115</sup>

During this last campaign, hundreds of thousands of hungry, desolate, and disease-ridden Circassians and Abkhazians were forced to leave their homeland for the Ottoman Empire from the coastal cities of Anapa, Novorossisk, Tuapse,

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<sup>112</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 43.

<sup>113</sup> Basbakanlik Devlet Arsivleri Genel Mudurlugu, *Osmanli Belgelerinde Kafkas Gocleri*, "Kirim ve Kafkasya Muhacirlerinin Iskani icin Alinacak Tedbirler (Measures to be Taken for Placement of Crimean and Caucasian Immigrants)," 58.

<sup>114</sup> Karpas, *Ottoman Population*, 67.

<sup>115</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 2.

Sochi, Adler, and Sukhumi.<sup>116</sup> They were transported on chartered vessels across the Black Sea to the Ottoman ports Trabzon, Samsun, Sinop, Constanta (in present day Romania), Varna and Burgas (in present day Bulgaria).

During the Russian-Circassian campaigns, the Northwest Caucasus fell into ruin, many tribes were completely wiped out, and as many as 800,000 people died. A total of as many as 1.2 million Muslims may have emigrated, or fled, from the Caucasus.<sup>117</sup> According to one estimate the number of immigrants to the Ottoman Empire was around two million.<sup>118</sup> Justin McCarthy mentions in his work that 800,000 Circassians survived, while approximately 400,000 died between 1864 and 1867.<sup>119</sup> Those who remained in the region after the great exile, between 150,000 and 200,000, were completely resettled to the plains of the North Caucasus, where they were easily controlled by the Russians.<sup>120</sup> The northeast coast of the Black Sea was cleansed of Circassians and was ripe for Slavic and Cossack colonization. During the tsarist period, Circassia remained desolate in the region, and there was an influx of Slav colonists, especially in the coastal regions.

After the great exodus of 1864, in the Northwest Caucasus, which was firmly ruled under Russian control, immigrations lingered into the 1920s, with a sporadic period of intensification in 1877–1878, and again from 1890 to 1908.<sup>121</sup> After the deportation of the great majority of locals, the region found itself neglected and forgotten until the demise of the Soviet Union. In 1877, war erupted between the Ottomans and the Russians. North Caucasians, whose memories were still fresh at that time, joined the Ottoman forces to fight against the Russians. A contingent landed at Sukhumi and occupied it. However, in 1878 Russian forces counter-attacked and retook Sukhumi and set out south,

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<sup>116</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 68.

<sup>117</sup> Eric J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: Tauris, 1993), 81.

<sup>118</sup> Karpal, *Ottoman Population*, 69.

<sup>119</sup> Justin McCarthy and Carolyn McCarthy, *Who are the Turks*, 56.

<sup>120</sup> Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, 69.

<sup>121</sup> Karpal, *Ottoman Population*, 67.

defeating the Ottoman forces and taking Kars. Later, the Treaty of Berlin of 1878 gave Russia the last remnants of the North Caucasus. The same treaty compelled all Circassian refugees, around 300,000, residing in the Balkans to immigrate once again to the inner parts of Anatolia and the Middle Eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman state established another commission to handle the huge amount of Circassians accumulated at the piers of Istanbul, Salonika, and Varna, and ordered the transportation of immigrants to Halep, Damascus (Sam), Adana, Sivas, Ankara, Diyarbakir, and Samsun.<sup>122</sup> Significant numbers of Circassians were settled in Syria during this second immigration wave.

## **E. OTTOMAN POLICY TOWARD THE NORTH CAUCASUS**

There were many reasons for the Ottoman government to receive Circassians onto Ottoman lands based on previous perceptions about the North Caucasus people. The goals behind this welcome were to homogenize the population in the areas where Christians lived, to use them as a power multiplier in the Ottoman military, and especially to learn the war tactics they used during their war against Cossacks and organized Russian forces.<sup>123</sup> The very first request of the initial Kabardin refugees to enroll in the Ottoman Army and their pledge of allegiance to the Muslim Ottoman state, on 29 January 1860, increased Ottoman acceptance of the Muslim refugees.<sup>124</sup> Also, Anatolia was suffering from a population shortage during the nineteenth century, and large areas of potentially arable land went undeveloped. The Ottoman government hoped that Circassians could colonize these areas and increase agriculture. This idea motivated the Ottoman government to settle many Circassians in a quagmire

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<sup>122</sup> Basbakanlik Devlet Arsivleri Genel Mudurlugu, Osmanli Belgelerinde Kafkas Gocleri, "Istanbul, Selanik ve Varna Iskelerinde Biriken 200,000 Muhacirin Idaresi icin Komisyon Kurulmasi (Establishing a Commission for Management of Immigrants Gathered in Istanbul, Seloniki and Varne Piers)," 103.

<sup>123</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 32.

<sup>124</sup> Basbakanlik Devlet Arsivleri Genel Mudurlugu, Osmanli Belgelerinde Kafkas Gocleri, "Kabartay Muhacirlerin Askerlik ve Egitim Talepleri (Military Service Request of Kabardin Immigrants)," 41.

area, which also deteriorated their situation.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the Ottoman Empire was losing territory from all directions during these years, and their tax base was steadily declining. Thus, new populations would be a source of additional revenues that could be used to save the Empire.<sup>126</sup>

There were some methods used by the Ottomans to increase the number of émigrés in addition to the Russian-Ottoman policies to exile them to the North Caucasus. Religious propaganda, promoting exile under the name of Hajj, personal relations especially based on slavery, social structure of the Circassians, and the notorious behaviors of Russians towards Circassians increased the number of deportations.<sup>127</sup>

Circassians, who embodied the idea of jihad symbolized in Shamil's personality throughout the years in the Caucasus, emigrated to the "Dar-ul Islam" (the Ottoman Lands) due to their belief system. Islam was one of the common identities among the Circassians in the North Caucasus, and the war against Russian forces under the concept of jihad was contributory to creation of Muslim identity.<sup>128</sup>

During this period, the Ottoman Empire used propaganda techniques by *mullahs* and agents to sustain the cultural and religious ties between Ottomans and Circassians. They repeated the difficulties of life in unbelievers' lands, making analogies between Muhammed's leaving Mecca under difficult conditions and the conditions in the North Caucasus. This encouraged future victories with the help of the Ottoman state, and expressed the ethnic perspective of dying on infidels' territories, and its religious perspective.<sup>129</sup> They also tried to attract Circassians by making false promises, such as ensuring that the Ottoman government would provide housing for immigrants. Also, Russian ambassador

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<sup>125</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 98.

<sup>126</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 98.

<sup>127</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 33.

<sup>128</sup> Akdogan, "The Roots of Circassian/Chechen Identity in Turkey," 8.

<sup>129</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 34.

Alexey Labanov-Rostovsky asserted that Turkish emissaries were spreading rumors in Circassia that the two empires were exchanging their Christian and Muslim populations.<sup>130</sup>

Another important propaganda method was the promotion of the Hajj to attract North Caucasians. Many believers were expecting to visit the sacred lands easily under Ottoman rule, and requested permission from local administrations. They were expecting to return to the homeland after this religious duty. However, the Russian government provided passports to North Caucasians, usually valid only for six months, and sent them to Ottoman lands. When they arrived in the Ottoman Empire, either local administrator took their passports directly or after the six months period they were replaced with Ottoman passports, called *hamidiye*.<sup>131</sup>

The perception of high-level Circassians in the Ottoman government to accept Circassians in large numbers also increased the size of the immigration. Many Circassians, even before the Great Exile, reached high administrative levels in the Ottoman Empire. The Grand Vizier Ozdemiroglu Cerkes Osman Pasha, governor of Trabzon Cecenzade Hacı Hasan Pasha, Cerkes Hafız Mehmet Pasha, and Cerkes İsmail Pasha were some of the notable Circassian figures in the Ottoman state before the 1860s. The commander of the Ottoman Navy and later the Grand Vizier Husrev Mehmet Pasha, an Abkhazian slave, was an influential figure in the Ottoman government.<sup>132</sup>

The change in Circassian social structure in the North Caucasus also attracted Circassians to immigrate onto the Ottoman lands. With the Russian conquest in 1864, Tsarist Russia abolished slavery and changed the feudal social structure in the region, which was important for Circassians. Thus, many Circassian tribal leaders refused to emancipate their slaves and immigrated to Ottoman lands with them. For example, when the Abkhazian prince Acba was

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<sup>130</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 90.

<sup>131</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 35.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 36.

forced to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire, approximately a thousand peasants and slaves followed him.<sup>133</sup>

Finally, Russian police forces and Cossacks were brutal with their behaviors against Circassians who refused to immigrate. The Russian government was also reluctant to react to the demands of Circassians, and the idea of being defenseless and alone in their homeland with the eventually increasing pressure of the security forces increased deportations to Ottoman lands.

## **F. LIFE IN THE OTTOMAN LANDS**

The initial immigrations caused many casualties during the journey from Russian ports onto Ottoman lands due to the lack of organization and the huge numbers of refugees, especially between 1863 and 1865. Refugees dispatched from Novorossiysk, Anapa, Taman, and Sochi reached the Ottoman ports throughout the spring and summer of 1864. Later, they were carried to other parts of the Empire. The first wave of boats left Trabzon in early January, the worst possible time of year on the Black Sea.<sup>134</sup>

Circassians were dying in large numbers from typhus and smallpox, and the epidemics followed them into the boats. The conditions on the shore were even worse, and that caused deaths in huge numbers at the Ottoman ports. Each day, 180 to 250 Circassians died at the Ottoman ports, according to the reports of the Russian Consulate at Trabzon.<sup>135</sup>

Initially, the Ottoman government planned to settle the Circassians in the places where Armenian and Russian populations were considerably high. The Porte hoped that Circassians would be grateful and become loyal subjects, serving as models for less cooperative peoples, especially the non-Muslim population in the empire. However, the Ottoman government was prevented from

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>134</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 86.

<sup>135</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 61.

settling Circassians wherever it thought suitable for them. The Russian government made it clear that the Circassians should be settled at a significant distance from Russian borders and no closer than the lines of Erzincan, Tokat, Amasya, or Samsun.<sup>136</sup> Also, the Russian government insisted that some of the refugees should be settled in Syria.<sup>137</sup> Also, some Circassians settled in Rumelia and Bulgaria as a counterweight to the Christian populations who were clamoring for independence.<sup>138</sup>

The cultural change that Circassians faced was also enormous in Ottoman lands. The language was totally different and it made the incorporation of Circassians into society more difficult. The structure of the Ottoman central government was also quite different than their previous pastoral life. The survivors of the Great Exile were the hardiest and most determined of their people, and they mostly believed that the method for survival could only be achieved through the use of violence.<sup>139</sup>

Unfortunately, the integration of Circassians into Ottoman society did not go smoothly. The tension between Circassians and Ottoman locals, among whom Circassians were settled, was a task that required large numbers of well-trained forces, which the Ottomans did not have at that time. Also, previous unsuccessful settlement experiences of the Tatars in the Balkans increased the negative approach towards the Circassians. This animosity among the people created many labels for Circassians, such as barbarians, brutal, and nomadic.<sup>140</sup>

Circassian slavery was another factor affecting the immigration of Circassians to Ottoman lands, since it was banned in the North Caucasus with the Russian conquest. Although slavery took on a number of interrelated forms,

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<sup>136</sup> Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 70.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>138</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 99.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 168.



there were actually two basic forms: agricultural slaves and domestic (or Harem and Porte) slaves, which had the same legal status and belonged to the Circassian slave class.<sup>141</sup>

Agricultural slavery was marginal in the Ottoman Empire during the 1860s. However, the exile of Circassians in huge numbers changed the context of agricultural slavery. In 1867, among the Circassian immigrants, there were 150,000 Circassian slaves, which later caused many problems in the Empire. First, slave-master relations hampered Ottoman settlement policies, since some slaves voluntarily followed their masters and often formed extended groups where their masters were settled. Second, many slaves asserted that they were free in Ottoman lands and this created disputes between slaves and their masters. Third, the mass immigration and the consequences created sufficient conditions for abuses committed by powerful and privileged immigrants to sell young Circassians to wealthy families and captains for the transportation of Circassians. Fourth, slave trade among individuals was controlled and spread wide through the control of some slave dealers.<sup>142</sup>

In rural areas, where Circassians were located in groups, there were many fights among these groups. With the absence of determination of the Ottoman administration to implement strict rules, or perhaps the inability to formulate a solution to the problem in regards to Circassian slavery, there was no peace among the immigrants, which later influenced the local security where they settled. Even the authorities were often obliged to extinguish the outbreak of fires they failed to prevent beforehand.<sup>143</sup>

Circassians were incorporated into the Crimean and Ottoman military service and many members of the Crimean and Ottoman ruling class married with Circassian women.<sup>144</sup> However, slavery among Circassians dates back to

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<sup>141</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppressions: 1840–1890* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.), 148.

<sup>142</sup> Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppressions: 1840–1890*, 153–154.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>144</sup> Richmond, *The Northwest Caucasus*, 39.

earlier times. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Circassia supplied most of the slave soldiers of the Mameluke dynasty of Egypt. The Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 did not change the role of Circassians, leaving the system more or less intact under Ottoman rule. The Circassians played a similar role in the Safavid Empire of Iran. From about 1550 to the end of the dynasty, they were a major component of the *ghulam*, the slave-soldiers of the Shah and in the harem, playing a major political role in both capacities.<sup>145</sup>

Circassian women were a political figure in Circassian-Russian relations before their increased role in the Ottoman Porte. Both men and women slaves also took part in the Russian government starting from the 1550s. In 1558, the Kabardin prince Temriuk sent his young son to Moscow to serve the Tsar. Three years later, he also sent his daughter Kuchenei (baptized Maria) as a bribe to the Russian tsar. Maria's sister also was also wife of the Astrakhan Tsarevich Bekbulat. Eventually, many Circassians took part in important elite positions in Russia. From the 1550s to 1650s Circassians seemed to be invisible, not as individuals, but as Circassians. They played an important role in Russian politics, while simultaneously retaining their ties with the Kabarda.<sup>146</sup> Their genealogies attest to the maintenance of their relations with Kabarda, and the circulation of information about those ties, since the Circassian murzas (*beys or begs*), were also the Russian prince Cherkasskii (Circassian lands) and were recognized loyal to both sides for the well-being of the Circassians.

The Ottoman Harem policy, which had a significant role over state policy since its abolition in 1908 with the Committee of Union (CUP) government, also increased both the numbers of Circassians in politics and their power in the administration. The increase of the Circassian women in the Porte caused the marriage of the nearly all Ottoman Sultans starting from Mustafa III (1757–1773)

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<sup>145</sup> Poul Bushkovitch, "Princes Cherkasskii or Circassian Murzas: The Kabardins in the Russian Boyar Elite, 1560–1700," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 45,1–2 (2004): 13. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/43704667?accountid=12702>.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 14.

with Circassian girls. Strong blood relations among Circassians caused accumulations of family members with the ones who managed to be part of the Porte before.

Circassians recognized themselves as protectors of the Ottoman state. In defeating an attempt to dethrone the Ottoman Sultan in the nineteenth century, a relative of Sultan Cerkes Hasan killed all the coup plotters at a house meeting.<sup>147</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Circassians could be found everywhere within the social leadership. One of the major reasons for the rise of Circassians was the change in the Ottoman central government and specifically the abandonment of the *devsirme* system of recruitment, and reduced role of the “palace school,” which facilitated Circassian ties in the upper echelon of the state.<sup>148</sup> Recruitment of slaves by prominent slaves (*kullarin Kullari*) became a common phenomenon from the seventeenth century onward,<sup>149</sup> forming the important components of the household of the Ottoman state. “Almost all the youth of the both sexes in Circassia insist upon being conveyed by their parents to Istanbul where the road to honor and advancement is open to everyone.”<sup>150</sup> Because of Circassian tribal ties, as well as sheer numbers, many of them who became the part of Ottoman society sought favor for their relatives, especially during the late nineteenth century when Circassians were arriving in huge numbers. Their patronage networks reached into the highest levels of the state structure. Mehmet Husrev Pasha, who started as a palace-reared slave and ended as admiral of the Ottoman fleet and Grand Vizier, recruited and placed

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<sup>147</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 37.

<sup>148</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, “Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s),” *Poetics Today*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies: Modern Period I (Autumn, 1993): 495.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 496.

<sup>150</sup> Julia Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan; And Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836* (London: Candler Press, 2010), 112–113.

forty to fifty slaves, most of who were Circassians.<sup>151</sup> About thirty of them elevated to the rank of *pasha* in the Ottoman military.<sup>152</sup>

However, later the position of slavery and the need for military force for the empire created contradictions. About 10 percent of the Russian-forced emigration, as unfree agricultural workers on Ottoman lands, were suitable for enrollment into the military. In 1882, the Ottoman government took the first steps to facilitate the conscription of Circassian slaves along with emancipated agricultural slaves. Such a step was necessary, because only free men could be drafted into the military. Also measures were taken to reduce the traffic of Circassian children, mostly girls, from the mid-1860s onward.<sup>153</sup>

Besides the social consequences of Circassians' immigration into the Ottoman Empire, the conditions that the government provided were not suitable for them, even in terms of basic living requirements. Those who managed to survive the journey saw that the Ottoman government was completely unprepared to deal with the half million or more sick and starving people who arrived at Ottoman ports. The shortfall of resources was so great that even the British ambassador at Istanbul proposed that the British government supply either financial or material aid.<sup>154</sup> Many citizens of the empire, including the Sultan and high-level administrators, made donations, yet this was far from meeting requirements.

There was no sufficient place to treat sick people and set up quarantine zones at first. Sanitary conditions quickly deteriorated, and diseases continued to spread as it had on Circassian shores.<sup>155</sup> The refugees were placed in temporary camps or left to their fate. Eventually, epidemic spread wherever Circassians

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<sup>151</sup> Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 135.

<sup>152</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery," 496.

<sup>153</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery," 485.

<sup>154</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 101.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

were settled and locals begun to suffer from the epidemic, which also deteriorated relations between Circassians and natives.

Problems between refugees and natives broke out frequently. The Ottoman government sent refugees farther inland to places “famous for their unhealthy climates.”<sup>156</sup> Mismanagement of settlement, corruption among local administrations, food shortages, and disease brought the Circassians to abject poverty in a short time. They were begging, working for menial jobs, or selling their children as slaves to survive. Others, primarily young people who lost their parents and had no other options, turned to banditry to survive. This created fear throughout the empire that Circassians would start looting wherever they were settled. This determined the perception of the locals towards them.

Many Circassians were settled toward the western and interior parts of the Anatolia.<sup>157</sup> The Uzunyayla plateau in central Anatolia, and some underpopulated nearby areas that had agricultural potential, were the popular locations. Many were unhappy about the conditions that the government provided and unhappy being separated from their families and friends. Thus, many Circassians fled where were settled. Homeless and technically in violation of Ottoman law, many resorted to begging and banditry, which caused the stereotype of Circassians as bandits among society. Fear of Circassians became so great that Muslim and Christian communities alike protested whenever a plan was announced to move Circassians into the region.<sup>158</sup>

The entire burden of supporting the refugees fell on the villagers themselves. Ottoman policy was to settle refugees in villages at a ratio of no more than one Circassian family for every five Turkish families, so that the Circassian families would be assimilated. This policy meant that Circassian clans and even individual families were broken up and settled far from one another.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>157</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 63.

<sup>158</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 104.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 104.

After the realization of the situation in the Ottoman Empire, which was not the promised land of propaganda, many Circassians tried to go back to the North Caucasus. However, Ottoman and Russian precautions to keep them on Ottoman territory impeded any return to the homeland. On 3 April 1865, the Russian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Ignatyef, issued an order to the consulates not to accept the request of the Circassians to return to their homelands, upon the order of the Russian Tsar.<sup>160</sup> After the rejection of the demands of the Circassians and their deteriorated living conditions in Ottoman lands, in 1902 a group occupied the Russian consulate in Samsun.<sup>161</sup>

After the initial chaos, Ottoman authorities organized to deal with the requirements of refugees. For example, at the beginning of December 1864, around 7,000, and at the end of the same month 7,400, Circassians were transported from Trabzon to Varna without any casualties on the way.<sup>162</sup> Later, many Circassians were settled in Sofia, Thessaloniki, Vidin, and many parts of Kosovo in the Ottoman Balkans.<sup>163</sup> According to Ottoman refugee reports concerning the Circassian deportation between 1857 and 1866, about one million Circassians were settled in Anatolia, 200,000 to 400,000 were settled in the Balkans, 25,000 were settled in Syria and Jordan, and 10,000 were settled in Cyprus.<sup>164</sup>

In response to the Bulgarian nationalist uprising, the Ottoman Empire used irregular troops called the *basibozuk* to suppress the rebellion and to secure the Muslim population. Some of the units were composed of Circassian émigrés and their responses to the Bulgarians were similar to the Russian response to Circassians during the 1860s.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 44.

<sup>161</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 44.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>163</sup> Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 68.

<sup>164</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 66.

<sup>165</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 68; Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 106.

The Circassian settlements in Anatolia during the second wave, especially in 1877–78, accumulated into two basic areas. The first was the belt from Samsun at the north to the Hatay in the south, combining the basic cities of Tokat, Amasya, Sivas, Kayseri, and Adana. The second group was scattered to the 400 villages of Duzce, Adapazari, Izmit, Bursa, Balikesir, and Biga covering the east and southern coast of the Marmara region.<sup>166</sup> Later, from 1881 until 1914, there were further emigrations from Russia, approximately half a million more Circassians, along with a large number of Muslims from Kazan and the Urals.<sup>167</sup> During the Second World War period, around 600,000 North Caucasians were accused of collaboration with German forces and were forced to settle in Turkey.<sup>168</sup>

One of the disputes among the Circassians in Turkey today is the question of whether Circassians were forced to exile or they migrated in a semi-voluntary manner. Since the 1990s, Caucasian associations in Turkey have used the exile discourses and named it the “Great Circassian Exile” (*Büyük Çerkes Sürgünü*), which has been symbolically commemorated in Turkey starting from the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the exile, on May 21. However, there are recently published books and articles placing this event into a genocide concept.<sup>169</sup>

## **G. ABDULHAMID II AND CIRCASSIANS**

The role of Circassians in the Ottoman state structure and especially their role to suppress the nationalist uprisings increased during the Abdulhamid II reign (1876–1909).<sup>170</sup> Circassians occupied many critical positions in the state structure (as did Albanians and Kurds) during the Abdulhamid era, which later

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<sup>166</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 69–71.

<sup>167</sup> Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 70.

<sup>168</sup> Lowell Bezanis, “Soviet Muslim Emigrés in the Republic of Turkey,” *Central Asian Survey* 13(1) (1994): 63.

<sup>169</sup> For such an argument of Circassian genocide, see for instance Antero Leitzinger, “The Circassian Genocide,” *Euroasian Politician* (October 2000); Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>170</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 95.

became propaganda figures among the Young Turks against the sultan. The Circassian policy of Abdulhamid can be categorized under four pillars.

First, Abdulhamid followed a policy of bringing Circassians to critical positions in the Empire. Second, he promoted the active participation of Circassians in the military and promoted many Circassian commanders to General. Third, he encouraged the immigration of Muslim North Caucasus populations onto Ottoman Lands and settled them in the places where Christian and Armenian populations lived. Also, Circassians were the most efficient ethnic group for Abdulhamid to use to suppress the uprising of other ethnic minorities. And, fourth, he aimed to use Circassians for pan-Islamic propaganda in Russia.

Circassians filled many critical posts during the Abdulhamid era. Mahmut Cemalettin Pasha, of Circassian descent, was a close friend of Abdulhamid from his childhood. The head of the military schools Hasan Hacimukov, head of the secret police Ahmet Pasha, interior Minister Cerkes Memduh Pasha, head of the special Dagestan Battalion Gazi Muhammed, provocateur of the Sultanist uprising on 31 March 1909 Cerkes Mehmet Pasha, and Ferik Ahmet Cemalettin Pasha were all Circassians.<sup>171</sup> Circassians were particularly used as cavalry forces in the Ottoman Army, starting from the preparation phase of the 1877–78 War between Russians and Ottomans. After the defeat in this war, the Ottoman government ordered the creation of Hamidian Regiments based on the cavalry forces to fight against Russian Cossacks.<sup>172</sup>

Circassians were the most suitable population for these regiments. The Ottoman government used every method to enroll Circassians as commanders of the newly formed regiments by providing them with honorary titles and money.<sup>173</sup> The Circassians ruled most of the regiments, although those were mainly composed of Kurds. Moreover, Circassians played an important role for the

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<sup>171</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 99–106.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 110.



creation of the *gendarme* forces of the Ottoman Empire, and Circassian officers commanded many of them.

Finally, Circassians were an important element for pan-Islamist Ottoman policies for igniting Islamic ideas in Russia and for preserving Muslim populations from foreign influence.<sup>174</sup> Increasing Islamic populations and their ties with the caliphate would create a sufficiently loyal local population in the Caucasus that could be used as a buffer zone for Russian invasions.

## **H. CONCLUSION**

On 21 May 1864—later labeled the “Circassian Day of Mourning,” celebrated by all Circassian communities, and even turned into a public holiday in the Circassian republics under pressure from Circassian nationalists—Russia proclaimed the end of the Caucasian War. Russia’s consistent attacks and brutal policy to control the region was the primary reason for the huge losses, yet the lack of state structure or lack of organized fighting among Circassians, and the lack of statesmanship to reduce the brutality through bargains and arrangements, also contributed to this brutal act.

The initial chaos of the immigration into the Ottoman lands created a very difficult environment for Circassians. They died in huge numbers from disease and hunger at the Ottoman ports. When they were settled into the inner parts of the Anatolia, their integration to the society became an important determination for their identity in the eyes of the locals. Some of them took part in notorious activities, such as selling their daughters, banditry, theft, etc., which created a negative portrayal against Circassians. The terms attached to them at that time continued for many years, and Circassians tried hard to erase these perceptions from the people’s mind. Parallel to this notorious identification, the suppressed

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 120.

and dissolute Circassians in small villages created a small and introverted<sup>175</sup> network of relations among themselves without information from the others in Anatolia and the North Caucasus.

Despite many troubles and unfortunate events, most Circassians began to integrate themselves into Ottoman life, since they had no other opportunity. The first methods they used to survive in the new lands was applying for positions in the government and military. Starting from 1860 on, the Ottoman government started to enroll Circassians into military colleges. The Ottoman government created several Circassian cavalry regiments, usually with a five-year term of duty.<sup>176</sup> While on one hand the Ottoman government promoted military service among Circassians, on the other hand, they forced them to integrate into social life by rejecting their customs, by rejecting their demands for resettlement, and by forcing them to learn Turkish.

The “Great Exile” from the North Caucasus was the critical experience for creating Circassian identity. Circassians have lived in Turkey since the “Great Exile” of 1864, and so far generations of “Turkish Circassians” who are born in Turkey continue the legacy of their ancestors. Listening to stories about the homeland and exile creates emotional ties between these people and their homeland. However, this common theme of exile compelled Circassians, speaking different languages and belonging to different tribes, to think about one another as members of the same community.

With both men and women in slavery, the concept of being *kul* to the Sultan took an important part in Circassian history under Ottoman rule. Female slavery, the foundation on which Ottoman slaveholding rested, helped the increase of Circassian politics with women in the Sultan’s harem, since access to females was a cornerstone of elite male privilege and entitlement. Eventually, Circassians started to affiliate themselves with the Sultan and his administration. However, the abolition of slavery impeded the privileged positions of Circassians

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<sup>175</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 75.

<sup>176</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 105.

and reduced their role in the administration. The ban of slavery was the destruction of a political, social, and economic institution, but also the erosion of several collective identities, such as the faithfulness of people to the Empire and sultan, simultaneously with the emergence of other identities, mainly official and nationally based.<sup>177</sup>

As Muslims in the Ottoman lands, like all other subjects of the Empire, Circassian immigrants were entitled to the full benefit of Ottoman citizenship, among which freedom was the most important value.<sup>178</sup> Muslim identity was one of the important figures for Circassian identity, since their jihad under the leadership of a mythological individual against their war with the Russians. Therefore, the identity of Circassians cannot be defined with only referencing diasporic identification, slave background, and totally Muslim identity. All complementary discussions and studies about Circassians have to be considered with the creation of a current identity.

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<sup>177</sup> Dror Ze'evi, "Kul and Getting Cooler: The dissolution of Elite Collective Identity and the Formation of Official Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 11 (2) (1996): 195.

<sup>178</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppressions: 1840–1890* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.), 164.

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### **III. CIRCASSIAN IDENTITY FROM LATE OTTOMAN ERA TO PRESENT**

This chapter's goal is to examine the politics of diaspora identity starting from the late Ottoman era to the present day within the Republic of Turkey. This chapter will look at the politics of identity and how Circassians identify themselves among the Turks and other ethnic communities (Muslim and non-Muslim), the relations of Circassians with the Turkish nation and Turkish state structure, and how Turks see Circassians within the evolution of Turkish national identity.

In Turkey, the Circassian diaspora is not constructed on a single idea. The idea of collective identity or "common we" in diaspora is a constantly changing term. Examining the persons and factors in historical sequence that contributed to the creation of different identities throughout Turkish history is important to understand the contemporary diaspora politics. Diaspora nationalism assumes that diasporic communities are the actors that shape the "common we" by negotiating, narrating, supporting, and sometimes resisting within the concepts of homeland, diaspora (or host country), and internal and international dynamics. That is why this chapter examines the Circassians in Turkey as a diaspora that is not homogeneous, but composed of many blocks and cliques. To define diaspora nationalism, these different groups will be examined in terms of their perspectives of nationalism within the nationalistic concept of the Republic of Turkey. Despite a lack of consensus on many subjects, and even on the naming of the group in Turkey, there are some constructed ideas that Circassian activists deal with in terms of nationalism.

Since the Circassians were mentioned as one of the ethnic minorities by the state and society, the relationship of Turkish nationalism with one of the Muslim, non-Turkish, Circassians will constitute the main focus of this chapter. To examine the place of Circassians in Turkish nationalist discourse, Turkish nationalism should be analyzed with its different forms, such as Turkish

nationalism under Ottoman rule, Kemalist nationalism, and extreme ethnic Turkish nationalism throughout history after describing diaspora life in Turkey.

#### **A. CIRCASSIANS AS A DIASPORIC COMMUNITY**

Circassians were sometimes seen as vagabond fighters in the military and sometimes as outcasts (*serseri*) in provincial communities throughout the Ottoman Empire. This same divide, as with many other instances, continues in the republican phase. For Circassians in Turkey, their contribution to the War of Independence alongside the Kemalist elite, and the Cerkes Ethem affair, as well as the Anzavur uprisings, constitute the turning points which have been constantly narrated in both Turkish and Circassian perspectives of Turkish history. Later, with the creation of the Republic and to protect its solidarity, the new regime took some precautions to create the Circassian rebellions, as well as other ethnic rebellions, such as the Seyh Said Rebellion<sup>179</sup> in the eastern provinces. This was recognized as a major issue that needed to be solved. During the first years of the Republic, many suspected they could never be integrated into the new Turkish society. However, the fact that Circassians were Sunni Muslims, and there were elite officers and officials who were loyal (Rauf Orbay, Fuat Cebesoy, Recep Peker) helped to mitigate accusations of being “disloyal” to the state, particularly in comparison to Alevi, Kurds, or Arabs.

Within the Circassian community, courageous and privileged positions on one hand and notorious positions on the other hand in Turkey relate to Circassian relations with the Turkish community and the state structure of Turkey. Examination of these relationships is important to understand Circassian diaspora in Turkey in particular and diasporic communities in general, but also the ways the Turkish state considers other ethnic groups in Turkey.

For example, Kemal Karpat states that Circassians, after their immigration from their homelands, integrated into Ottoman society peacefully while the upper

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<sup>179</sup> Mesut Yeğen, “Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no.6 (2004): 66.

elite became identified with the state elite.<sup>180</sup> Soner Cagaptay places Circassians in a superior position than the other ethnic minorities in Turkey.<sup>181</sup> Ayhan Kaya describes Circassians as the most privileged ethnic group in Turkey in his analysis of political participation strategies.<sup>182</sup> Baskin Oran also defines Circassians as a group that is far from questioning and opposing Turkish identity.<sup>183</sup> Likewise, Kemal Kirisci states that, starting from the early years of the Republic until today, Circassians are considered among the ethnic groups that melted in to the superior identity and have been assimilated successfully.<sup>184</sup> In a similar rhetoric, Mitat Celikpala presents Circassians as a group that lives in harmony within Turkish society compared to the other groups, although there has been an increased diaspora formation starting from the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>185</sup> Such perspective considers Circassian as an ethnic group that is more accommodationist to the state policy and does not resist the state, like the Kurds.

Life in Turkey was still difficult for Circassians during the Republican era. The approach to them changed from being equal subjects based upon Islamic solidarity to being an unwanted minority that was targeted for assimilation into the state ideology of nationalism.<sup>186</sup> Moreover, more than ten thousand officers were purged from the military between 1908 and 1913, and minorities were the primary targets. Their organizations were closed, and many Circassians migrated to Turkey after the Balkan wars.

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<sup>180</sup> Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 344.

<sup>181</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 160.

<sup>182</sup> Ayhan Kaya, "Political Participation Strategies of the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey," *Mediterranean Politics* 9(2) (2004): 221.

<sup>183</sup> Baskin Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar: Kavramlar, Teori, Lozan İç Mevzuat, İçtihat, Uygulama* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), 58.

<sup>184</sup> Kemal Kirisci, "Turkey: A Country of Transition from Emigration to Immigration," *Mediterranean Politics* 12(1) (2007): 93.

<sup>185</sup> Mitat Çelikpala, "From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42 no.3 (2006): 426.

<sup>186</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 126.

One important issue for émigrés to the Ottoman Empire was the idea of returning to the homeland. Many Circassians in the Ottoman Empire maintained ties between their places of origin and, when conditions allowed, frequently returned.<sup>187</sup> The first return demands started in large numbers in the early 1860s. Sometimes, these demands occurred just after months of immigration and sometimes after a span of several years. Frequently, émigrés applied to Russian consulates elsewhere to return or simply showed up at the Russian border requesting to return to Russia to live.<sup>188</sup> Sometimes people returned because of the severity of conditions on Ottoman Lands, sometimes to work in the Caucasus after gaining an education within the Ottoman Empire, and sometimes for personal and financial matters. Besides Circassians, many people continued their ties with the homeland for years with short visits.<sup>189</sup>

For Circassians in Turkey, the War of Independence and the *Cerkes Ethem* Affair carries a significant importance for the diaspora. Within the Turkish War of Independence there were different groups that followed different ideologies. There were two basic groups: one who was supporting the independence movement with the Kemalist regime, and one who supported the Sultan and Caliphate. These two groups will be covered in detail in further pages. And, there was one group that tried to establish an independent state in Ottoman lands.

Stripped of their protected status and under assault once again by the regime, some 22 Circassians met at a coffee house in Izmir on 24 November 1921.<sup>190</sup> At the end of the meeting, which included one of the important figures of the Committee of Union and Progress leader Cerkes Resit and his brother

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<sup>187</sup> James H. Meyer, "Immigration, Return, and the Politics of Citizenship: Russian Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, 1880–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (1) (2007): 16.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 21–22.

<sup>190</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 124.



Cerkes Ethem, this group called themselves members of the Association for the Strengthening for the Near Eastern Circassians Rights (Sark-I Karib Cerkesleri Temin’l Hukuk Cemiyeti), and released a document called “The General Statement of the Circassian Nation to the Great Powers and the World” demanding the recognition of their national existence, presenting a danger to the Circassian nation from Turkey, and demanding to live under Greek protection rather than Turkish.<sup>191</sup> Their devotion to Islam did not prevent them from collaborating with Rums and Armenians on this issue, and for the group there was no need to embrace Ottomanism or Islamism as an identity.<sup>192</sup>

Many Circassians, especially the Simali Kafkas Association in Istanbul and nationalist movement in Ankara, protested this attempt. They declared that Strengthening the Near Eastern Circassians Rights Association did not represent the Circassians, and they were labeled as traitors.<sup>193</sup>

The concern of the Kemalist government about Circassians who might have sided with the Greeks continued, and focused particularly upon the south Marmara region. Between 28 May and 21 June of 1923, local authorities ordered the deportation of the locals of the fourteen villages<sup>194</sup> in the countries of Gonen and Manyas to the eastern parts of Anatolia.<sup>195</sup> A second group of villages were also forced to sell their properties and wait for deportation.<sup>196</sup> Upon these, Mehmet Fertgesoy Soenu published a paper about the deportation and sent it to

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<sup>191</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 124–126.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 132–133.

<sup>194</sup> These villages are: Ucpinar, Muratlar, Armutlu, Derekoy, Cinarli, Bogazpinar (Muruvvetler), Kizilkilise (Kizikkoy), Yenikoy, Dumbe (Tepecik), Ilica (Ilicabogaz), Karacallik, Bolagac, Degirmenbogazi, and Haciosman. Mentioned in Izzet Aydemir, “Gonen-Manyas Cerkesleri Surgunu,” Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu-KAFFED, Accessed on 10 November 2013, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/bilgi-belge/tarih/item/203-gonen-manyas-cerkeslerinin-surgunu.html>

<sup>195</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 142.

<sup>196</sup> Izzet Aydemir, “Gonen-Manyas Cerkesleri Surgunu,” Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu-KAFFED, accessed on 10 November 2013, [http://www.kafkasfederasyonu.org/nart\\_dergisi/sayi\\_15/gonen\\_manyas\\_surgun.htm](http://www.kafkasfederasyonu.org/nart_dergisi/sayi_15/gonen_manyas_surgun.htm).

every member of the parliament. According to one account, Rauf Orbay secured the return of the Circassians, but many of them who returned found their homes ransacked or destroyed.<sup>197</sup> For Soenu, this attitude towards the Circassians meant physical exile of the community, but also the abuse (to the point of death) that accompanied exile, which increased the impression towards Circassians as traitors, bandits, and rebels.<sup>198</sup>

The fight against the Circassians continued with the declaration of a list of 150 names (Yuzellilikler) who were labeled as the “traitors of the fatherland” and expelled from Anatolia.<sup>199</sup> Of the names in the list, nine of were Cerkes Ethem and friends; 18 of them were members of Sark-I Karib Cerkesleri Cemiyeti; 40 of them friends of Anzavur; 11 of them were military and government personnel who abused their duties; and 8 of them were supporters of the Ottoman Sultan. In total, 86 of 150 on the list were Circassians.<sup>200</sup>

The prosecution of the Circassians during the Independence Tribunals (İstiklal Mahkemeleri) was another attempt to discriminate against Circassians. Many of the decisions to sentence prominent Circassians figures, such as Rauf Orbay, Bekir Sami Kunduk, Cerkes Ethem and his brothers, into jail were overturned by subsequent trials or amnesty. The head of the court was accused of killing Circassian Deli Halit Pasha in the corridors of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, but this event was covered up quickly, which constituted doubts for the attitude of the court towards Circassians.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 143.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>200</sup> İzzet Aydemir, “Yuzellilikler Listesi ve Cerkesler,” 15 June 2005, Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu-KAFFED, accessed on 10 November 2013, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/bilgi-belge/tarih/item/226-yuzellilikler-listesi-ve-cerkesler.html>.

<sup>201</sup> İzzet Aydemir, “İstiklal Mahkemeleri ve Cerkesler,” 15 June 2005, Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu-KAFFED, accessed on 10 November 2013, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/bilgi-belge/diaspora/item/121-istiklal-mahkemeleri-ve-cerkesler.html>.

## B. CIRCASSIANS IN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

There is growing literature and academic interest questioning the established notion of Turkish national identity and the boundaries of Turkish citizenship. Turkish nationalism has experienced a long evolutionary process, starting from the late Ottoman era. The official formulation of Turkish national identity denies the ethnic and cultural diversity in the country, the only exception being the religious minorities that were recognized in the Lausanne Treaty of 1923,<sup>202</sup> where Turkey was finally recognized internationally as a sovereign state.<sup>203</sup> A society that is traditionally known as multi-ethnic and multi-cultural would be transformed into a uniform Turkish nation-state. During this discourse, Muslim identity has preserved itself and this was acknowledged by Turkish authorities to be the key to achieving Turkishness. Likewise, non-Muslims were seen as an obstacle to achieving Turkishness. It is generally known that Turkish governments have interpreted the term “Turkish descent and culture” to cover Turkish-speaking groups or ethnically Turkish groups, but also Albanians, Bosnians, Circassians, Pomaks, and Tatars, particularly from the Balkans.<sup>204</sup>

The inclusion of non-Muslim groups in Turkish politics and society in the process of nation building was conditional and complex since many of the politicians and contemporary scholars presented different arguments about the theory. As mentioned in the Lausanne Treaty, non-Muslims were rejected almost totally, and non-Turkish groups were not exempt from the means of exclusion. Mesut Yegen defines the openness of the definition of Turkishness to Muslim ethnic groups based on their “actual and assumed loyalty to the Ottoman-Turkish state.”<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, he questions the Turkishness of Kurds after their revolt

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<sup>202</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 36(3) (2000): 1.

<sup>203</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 160.

<sup>204</sup> Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices,” 7.

<sup>205</sup> Mesut Yegen, “Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 66.

against the state in 1925.<sup>206</sup> Circassians have similarities with the Kurds, under this definition and since the revolt of Cerkes Ethem, which will be covered later in this chapter, against the state. Because of this, the perception of ethnic Turks against Circassians is still an important landmark in identity studies.

### **C. CIRCASSIANS AND TURKISH NATIONALISM DURING THE OTTOMAN ERA**

The search for identity became a source of tension in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. Kemal Karpat defines how three pre-existing identities—Ottoman, Muslim and Turk—evolved into a single “national” identity during the late Ottoman era and in the Republic of Turkey. Three identities were used interchangeably until the time of republic; however, ethnic Turkishness did not answer all identities when the state refused the other two in the early 1930s.<sup>207</sup> The usage of the term “Turk” emerged in the late Ottoman era. “By the mid-1890s the elites regarded the term ‘Turk’ expressing both their affiliation with the state and their Islamic and Ottoman identity without affecting their special Albanian, Circassian or even Arab ethnic identity.”<sup>208</sup>

Ottomanism and Islamism provided greater structure under which Turks, Arabs, Albanians, Circassians, and other ethnic groups integrated themselves into a larger social group. Ethnic Turkishness then developed in similar terms with the other two as one of the integral parts of Turks’ modern identity. All these identities were intended for the survival of the state, rather than the welfare and happiness of society.

Erik Jan Zürcher examines the emergence of Turkish national identity between the last era of the Ottoman Empire and first fifteen years of the Turkish Republic. He defines the binding forces on which the Ottoman Empire and Turkey were built in three different eras: before the Young Turks period, the

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<sup>206</sup> Mesut Yeğen, “Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 66.

<sup>207</sup> Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 2.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

Young Turks period, and the Kemalist era. During the first era, being an Ottoman and being a Muslim were both used as binding forces, while during the second era the term “Ottoman Muslim” became an identity. During this period Ottomanism, Islamism, and Turkism were not rejected totally and were used as supplementary elements of the new identity. Therefore, as mentioned by Bernard Lewis, Turkish-speaking Ottoman Muslims of Balkan and Caucasian origin played a considerable role in the national movement.<sup>209</sup> In the third era, the Turkish state, through reforms in many fields, especially in the political structure of the country, took measures towards becoming a “nation-state” with a centralized administrative structure, a modern education system, and a new conception of rights and duties for its subjects based on the idea of Turkishness.

Yusuf Akcura, another prominent Turkish nationalist, states that Turkish nationalism emerged as a linguistic movement in the late nineteenth century, and later it developed into the first embodiment of Panturkism, a manifestation of Turkish nationalism.<sup>210</sup> The transformation of a cultural movement to a political ideology started in the beginning of the twentieth century as a response to multiple crises of the empire, rising nationalism among the ethnic groups under the Ottoman umbrella, and the failure of previous identities—Islamism and Ottomanism—to overcome disintegration during the nineteenth century. According to Akcura, the first two ideologies already influenced the Ottoman State, whereas the third one—Turkism—was a new idea.<sup>211</sup> For Akcura, Ottomanism was bound to fail and Islamism was difficult, whereas taking the direction towards a racially based Turkish nationalism appeared to be inevitable.

The failure of French nationalism also influenced the course of nationalist ideas in the Ottoman and Republic eras. Ottomanism was the effort to create a new nation called the “Ottoman State” within the existing borders of the Empire,

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<sup>209</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims, and Turkish Nationalists; Identity Politics 1908–1938,” In *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, Ed. Kemal H. Karpat, 150–179 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 172–173.

<sup>210</sup> İsmail Fehmi, “Yusuf Akçura’s Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset (‘Three Kinds of Policy’),” *Oriente Moderno* 61 (1981): 2.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 18.

and to share the same rights and equalities between Muslims and non-Muslims. The policy of creating an Ottoman nation began under the Sultan Mahmud II era when nationalist ideas were still under the influence of the French revolution, based on “will” (*vicdani istek*) rather than “descent and race” (*soy ve ırk*). Sultan Mahmud II and his followers were deceived by the notion of the French Revolution for nationalism to keep different races and religious groups under the notion of equality and freedom. Thus, the defeat of Napoleonic France and the rise of race-based Germany in Europe had an impact on Ottoman nationalism. The Ottoman policy of empire based on the notion of “will” lost its legitimacy.<sup>212</sup>

Within these concerns, Turkish nationalism was the youngest of the current ideologies and not one, but two different movements. The older movement was Panturkism, which originated among the Tatars of Kazan, Crimea and Azerbaijan, and was brought to the Ottoman Empire by Russian émigrés after 1908, and the other movement was the Turkish nationalist movement romantically idealized by the Anatolian peasants as the “real Turks” whose virtues should be rediscovered and adopted by the Ottomans.<sup>213</sup>

After 1912–13, the state tried to make Turkism the formal identity of the state while upholding the other two. However, with the abolition of the monarchy in 1922, and Caliphate in 1924, Turkish national identity emerged as the only superimposed structure to combine the nation together. This new identity refused the old two forms to break free of historical romanticism, nostalgia, and irredentism; and the new political regime became the guardian of the new identity and secular modernism. Since the old two were rejected in the new republic, strict rules were required to protect it.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 17.

<sup>213</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims, and Turkish Nationalists; Identity Politics 1908–1938,” In *Ottoman Past and Today’s Turkey*, Ed. Kemal H. Karpat, 150–179 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 154.

<sup>214</sup> Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 27–28.

The ethnic identity of the Turkish Republic was defined as “Turkishness” by Kemal Kirisci.<sup>215</sup> Although citizenship was defined as “Turks” in the 1924 constitution, the government aimed to embrace all different ethnic and religious groups, which were once identified as Ottoman or Muslim, under the single term of “Turkishness.” Kurdish rebellions and Islamist fundamentalist uprisings, as well as the Circassian rebellions in the northwest part of Turkey, can be considered as reasons for the identity problems or the consequences of it. Therefore,

the identifying features of ‘Turkishness’ were not solely Turkish ethnicity but the ability and willingness to adopt the Turkish language and membership of Sunni Muslim ethnic groups closely associated with past Ottoman rule. Hence, Bosnians, Circassians, Pomaks, Tatars and so on were definitely included in this definition, while Gagauz Turks, who are Christian, and members of other Christian minorities, Alevis and unassimilated Kurds were excluded.<sup>216</sup>

Turkish national identity, in Geller’s words, is defined as “an unselfconscious blend of Kemalist republicanism and urban Islam fusing Turkish and Muslim identity in an apparently seamless web of symbol and sentiment, as Ottoman and Muslim may blend once again.”<sup>217</sup>

Under the Kemalist regime, there was a clear decision to seek a new Turkish national and secular corporate political identity to replace the “Ottoman Muslim;” therefore, Kemalists’ concept of nationality firmly based on language, culture, and common purpose (ideal) was placed into practice with the necessary means. However, in April of 1920 the new Turkish Grand National Assembly was not ready to embrace this idea. Thus, during the opening speech of the Assembly Mustafa Kemal said:

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<sup>215</sup> See Kemal Kirisci, “The EU as a Vehicle of Post-National Transformation,” In *Turkey Beyond Nationalism, Towards Post-nationalist Identities*, Edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>216</sup> Kirisci, “The EU as a Vehicle of Post-National Transformation,” 189.

<sup>217</sup> Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, 3.

It should not be assumed that there is only one kind of nation from the communities of Islam inside these borders. Within these borders, there are Turks. There are the Çerkes; as well as other Muslim communities.<sup>218</sup>

Later, with the reforms, the new government started to create a new national identity. It started with the ban of the use of the terms Kürt (Kurd), Laz, Çerkes (Circassian), Kurdistan and Lazistan.<sup>219</sup> Thus,

asking Kurds, Arabs or Circassians to adopt the Turkish culture is an impossible demand even in the eyes of Kemalist ideology. Since the adaptation of Turkish culture was a prerequisite for being a member of the Turkish nation and bidding force for the newly established republic, cultural and linguistic privileges of the ethnic minorities had to be rejected to construct the identity.<sup>220</sup>

Atatürk's view at that time, perhaps quite understandably judging by the trials from which the Turks had just emerged, was that the only way the nation could succeed was to create homogeneity. However,

when the Turkish republic was created in 1923, a large proportion of its population consisted of recent immigrants of Slavic, Albanian, Greek, Circassian, Abkhaz, and Chechen origin, whereas people that could claim descent from the Turkic tribes that had come from Central Asia were certainly a minority of Anatolia's population. It was in this complex setting that Atatürk and his associates aimed to create a modern nation-state, an integrated, unitary polity of the French type. For that reason, the model of the nation that Atatürk and his associates adopted was civic... to be a Turk meant to live within the boundaries of the republic and thereby be its citizen.<sup>221</sup>

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there was even a discussion about describing the people of the new Turkey as 'Türkiyeli', as the land of Turks, Kurds, Arabs,

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<sup>218</sup> Mustafa Kemal, "Mutarekeden Meclisin Acilisina kadar Gecen Olaylar," in *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1945), 28 ; Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 45.

<sup>219</sup> Zürcher, "Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims, and Turkish Nationalists," 176.

<sup>220</sup> Zürcher, "Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims, and Turkish Nationalists," 178.

<sup>221</sup> Svante E. Cornell, "The Kurdish Question in Turkish Politics," in *Dangerous Neighborhood: Contemporary Issues in Turkey's Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael S. Radu (Philadelphia: The Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2003), 126.



Circassians, etc., reserving the term 'Turk' for the ethnically Turkish. Turk was retained but with the same kind of meaning as British or American."<sup>222</sup>

Mustafa Kemal created Turkey out of the Ottoman Empire ruins in 1923; there is an unshakable sense of both Turkish identity, and the need to defend it. That is why:

becoming a Turk entailed the suppression of an individual's own ethnic identity. In other words, Atatürk's maxim was generous in allowing everyone who desired to do so to become a Turkish citizen, but it did not provide a solution for those who were not prepared to abandon their previous identities in favor of the new national idea.<sup>223</sup>

In summary, the Kemalist regime packaged Turkish identity in a uniform term, a homogeneous understanding that would continue to shape Turkish thinking for decades to come.

#### **D. KEMALIST DEFINITION OF NATIONALISM AND CIRCASSIANS**

Within the creation of the new identity from the heritage of the Ottoman state, yet not embracing all politics of the old, Mustafa Kemal created the new identity independent from religious bonds and ethnic terms, basically covering all citizens under the ideology of Turkishness. It was started with close cooperation of further values and embraced religious and ethnic motives. However, with the abolition of the Caliphate on 3 March 1924, religious influence significantly decreased over the government.

On the other hand, the initial positive attitude towards ethnic minorities changed eventually with subsequent events of the Circassians, as well as the other ethnic minorities in the newly established republic, starting from the War of Independence. Anzavur's and Ethem's disloyalty to the government, and later the

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<sup>222</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (England: Oneworld Publication, 2003), Preface ix.

<sup>223</sup> Cornell, "The Kurdish Question in Turkish Politics," 127.

assassination attempt against Mustafa Kemal, created the symptoms of deeper insecurity among some within society and the elite towards immigrants in general.

Starting from the War of Independence to the mid-1920s, the Ottoman legacy of nationalism based on previous identifications was inherited and employed by Mustafa Kemal. Throughout the War of Independence and the initial aftermath of the war symbols of religious identity and the national identity of “Ottoman Muslim,” not of Turks, remained as the national identity.

Ziya Gokalp’s thoughts about Turkish nationalism, with his corporatist approach of Islam and Turkish nationalism, helped define mainstream political discourse and action until the early 1930s. He criticized his contemporaries for confusing concepts with each other and devoted his energy to developing a sociological definition of nationalism:

Nation is not a racial, ethnic, geographical, political, or voluntary group or association. Nation is a group composed of men and women who have gone through the same education, who have received the same acquisitions in language, religion, morality, and aesthetics. The Turkish folk express the same idea by simply saying; “the one whose language is my language, and whose faith is my faith, is of me”. Men [sic] want to live together, not with those who carry the same blood in their veins, but with those who share the same language and the same faith. Our human personality is not our physical body but our mind and soul.<sup>224</sup>

Parallel to this idea, Mustafa Kemal mentioned the importance of multi-ethnic identity in terms of creating “national borders:”

These borders have not been drawn only with military considerations, they are national borders. They have been set as national borders. But it should not be assumed that there is only one kind of nation within the Islamic element inside these borders. Within these borders, there are Turks; there are the Cerkes (Cherkess); as well as other Muslim elements. These borders are national borders for kardes, [sibling] nations that live in a mixed

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<sup>224</sup> Ziya Gokalp, *Turklugun Esaslari* (1959), 136–137, quoted in Ayse Gul Altinay, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 18.

way and that have totally unified their goals. [In the article concerning borders], the privileges of each of the Muslim elements within these borders, which stem from their distinct milieu (muhit), customs (adat) or race (ırk), have been accepted and certified with sincerity and in a mutual fashion.<sup>225</sup>

In a subsequent speech, Mustafa Kemal reiterated his ideas about who made up the “Nation:”

Gentlemen...What we mean here, and the people whom this Assembly represents, are not only Turks, are not only Çerkes, are not only Kurds, are not only Laz. But it is an intimate collective of all these Muslim elements....The nation that we are here to preserve and defend is, of course, not comprised of one element. It is composed of various Muslim elements...We have repeated and confirmed, and altogether accepted with sincerity, that [each and every element that has created this collective] are citizens who respect each other and each other's racial, social, geographic rights. Therefore, we share the same interests. The unity that we seek to achieve is not only of Turks or of Çerkes, but Muslim elements that include all of these.<sup>226</sup>

However, the “sibling nations that live in a mixed way and that have totally unified their goals”<sup>227</sup> was replaced by the mononational identity starting from the 1920s. Ziya Gokalp's cultural nationalism was replaced by a dominant ethnic identity. Thus, the 1920s emerged as a crossroad for Circassians for inclusion into the nation. The civic definition turned to a more ethnic nation, the position of the non-Turkish Muslims became questioned, and these groups were under close examination.

Anatolia in 1923 was a completely different place from what it was in 1913 in terms of identity. The Crimean War of 1853–1856, the great exile of Circassians to Ottoman territory in 1864, Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–78, and the Balkan War of 1912–13 brought hundreds of thousands of refugees to Ottoman lands. Finally, under the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, the

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<sup>225</sup> Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation*, 19.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

remainder of the Greek Orthodox population of Anatolia, about 900,000 people, was exchanged against the Muslims from Greece who numbered about 400,000. After all these population exchanges, the larger Christian communities were practically gone, and Anatolia, which was 80 percent Muslim before the Balkan Wars, was approximately 98 percent Muslim in 1923. Linguistically, only two large groups were left: the Turks and the Kurds, with many smaller groups (Greek, Armenian and Syriac-speaking Christians, Spanish-speaking Jews, and Circassian, Laz and Arabic-speaking Muslims), as well as immigrants from the Balkans.<sup>228</sup>

Mustafa Kemal wanted a uniform society—*not* a melting pot. The Ottoman Empire made its mistakes by being too much of a mixing pot of people, languages, cultures, and races, and it was time to homogenize. It was far too scattered and patched together, and the new republic could only be formed by consolidation and a more realistic sense of boundary. And, from Atatürk's view at that time, perhaps quite understandably judging by the trials from which the Turks had just emerged, the only way the nation could succeed was homogenously. However, when the Turkish republic was created in 1923, a large proportion of its population consisted of recent immigrants of Slavic, Albanian, Greek, Circassian, Abkhaz, and Chechen origin, whereas people that could claim descent from the Turkic tribes that came from Central Asia were certainly a minority of Anatolia's population. It was in this complex setting that Atatürk and his associates aimed to create a modern nation-state, an integrated, unitary polity of the French type. For that reason, "the model of the nation that Atatürk and his associates adopted was civic...To be a Turk meant to live within the boundaries of the republic and thereby be its citizen."<sup>229</sup>

However, a civic identity was not readily acknowledged by the people. He had to rally them around a different central commonality: Islam. Despite Kemal's future secular goals, this homogeneity was a Muslim-centered one. With no

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<sup>228</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 164.

<sup>229</sup> Cornell, "The Kurdish Question in Turkish Politics," 126.

unifying identity, culture, or Turkishness yet in place in Anatolia, Islam was the only flag around which they could unite. A report from the Erzurum congress mentions this identity as “the Muslim majority consisting of Turks and Kurds who for centuries have mixed their blood in an intimate relationship and who form the community (*ümmet*) of one prophet.”<sup>230</sup> The same congress report defines the constituency of the nationalist as:

It purports to speak on behalf of ‘the Muslims who form one nation (*millet*), consisting of Turks and Kurds’ and ‘the Muslim majority consisting of Turks and Kurds who for centuries have mixed their blood in an intimate relationship and who form the community (*ümmet*) of one prophet.’ The statutes of the society organizing the Erzurum congress are even more explicit: they speak about ‘all Islamic elements of the population’ and say that ‘all Muslim compatriots are natural members of this society.’<sup>231</sup>

The Muslim identity of the period before 1923 was a genuine popular movement, which made possible the mobilization of the masses during difficult times, yet it was unsuitable as a binding force to hold together a society modernizing itself on the basis of secularism and positivism defined by the “leader.”<sup>232</sup> Turkish nationalism was based on “an organic view of Turkish culture” and not fully on a voluntarist/legalist concept of nationality.<sup>233</sup> However, this was not sufficient to shape the newly created republic and led politicians to some measures to assimilate the “others” within the “new identity.”

Foreign understanding of Turkish nationalism and its vulnerabilities in the creation phase of Turkey also created strong impacts on the assimilation or exchange of ethnic minorities after the Lausanne Treaty in 1923. Rıza Nur, then the Minister of Health, Minister of Education, and representative of the Republic at the treaty discussions, mentions the European view as:

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<sup>230</sup> Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists,” 164.

<sup>231</sup> Zürcher, “The Core Terminology of Kemalism: *Mefkûre*, *Millî*, *Muası*, *Medenî*,” 108.

<sup>232</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey* (London: Tauris, 2010), 234.

<sup>233</sup> Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 235.

Europeans know three types of minorities for us: racial minorities (irkca ekaliyet), linguistic minorities (dilce ekaliyet), and religious minorities (dince ekaliyet). This is a very fatal danger for us. With the concept of race they are going to put Circassians, Abkhazians, Bosnian, Kurds together with Rums and Armenians. With the concept of language they are going to put Muslim groups with other languages minorities. With the concept of religion they are going to make 2 million Alevites who are pure Turks minorities. That is they are going to break us apart. When I heard about this division, I got the shivers. I tried a lot, yet with a lot of discussions, I abolished them from the treaty.

Here is the lesson we have concluded: leaving no person of any race, language, religion is the most essential, just and crucial task. ....That's why, scattering the Circassian and Albanian to the villages where Turks are predominant to assimilate them into the Turkish identity is the foremost task.<sup>234</sup>

After the Lausanne conference Riza Nur sharply criticized the Ministry for inappropriate settlement of the Circassians and immigrants from Crete and the Albanians, as well as Bosnians.<sup>235</sup> Approximately one month after this debate, on 11 December 1924, the Ministry of Exchange, Reconstruction, and Settlement was closed and its duties were delegated to the Department of Settlement created under the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>236</sup>

The 1924 constitution was an important milestone for the creation of national identity. After long debates about the meaning of Turkishness, the First National Assembly agreed on “the people of Turkey regardless of their religion and race would, in terms of their citizenship, be called Turkish.”<sup>237</sup> There is something more in this definition when compared to former and later

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<sup>234</sup> Riza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıralarım*, Cilt 3, 1044.

<sup>235</sup> TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Devre: II, Cilt: 10, içtima: 4, 05/11/1340–05/11/1924, p.152, In Ülker, Erol ‘Assimilation of the Muslim communities in the first decade of the Turkish Republic (1923–1934)’, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, para, 41.

<sup>236</sup> ‘Mübadele İmar ve İskan Vekaletinin Lavile Vazifesinin Dahiliye Vekaletine Devri Hakkında Kanun’, no: 529, 11/12/1340–11/12/1924, *Düstur*, Tertip: 3, Cilt: 6, pp. 37–38, In Ülker Erol, “Assimilation of the Muslim communities in the first decade of the Turkish Republic (1923–1934),” *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, para, 41.

<sup>237</sup> Mesut Yeğen, “Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40(6)(2004): 58.

counterparts. The 1876 constitution of the Ottoman state defines citizenship as: *“Whatever religion or sect they are from all individuals subject to the Ottoman State, without exception, would be called Ottomans.”*<sup>238</sup>

The “In terms of citizenship” condition does not exist in the 1876 constitution since Ottomanism was enough to cover all identities in the state; Turkishness was unable to hold the same ground. Article 54 of the 1961 constitution states: “Everyone who is tied to the Turkish State through citizenship ties is Turkish.”<sup>239</sup>

There is a difference between the 1924 constitution and the 1961 constitution, since Turkishness is defined as a more authentic idea of political citizenship. To understand the real meaning behind the article, the evaluation of the constitution writing process has to be examined. When the article was introduced to the National assembly it read as follows: “The people of Turkey regardless of their religion and race would be called Turkish.”<sup>240</sup>

This definition was quite similar to the 1876 constitution, yet unable to include minorities in the Republic. Later, a deputy of Bozok (Yozgat), Ahmet Hamdi Bey, suggested the article be amended as follows: “Of Turkish people, who admit (assimilate into) the Turkish culture would be called Turkish.”<sup>241</sup>

According to these definitions, the tension is evident that the Assembly was not content to take Turkishness as a status achieved by citizenship, which is defined in political and territorial terms. The same article today is stated to be a signifier of the existence of a “more authentic Turkishness other than

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<sup>238</sup> Yeğen, “Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey, 59.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 60.

Turkishness in terms of citizenship,”<sup>242</sup> and as an identifier discussion over the definition and whether it encompasses the ethnic minorities or not (an ongoing discussion in Turkey).

The new education system was influential for the creation of national unity and the elimination of different ethnic groups starting from the mid-1920s. Since the Anatolian population engaged in a very difficult period of wars starting with the Balkan Wars, there was no unity and efficiency in education. Moreover, the literacy rate was quite low and there were different spoken local dialects all around the country. First the campaign titled “Citizen Speak Turkish” (*Vatandas Türkçe Konus*) started on 26 April 1927 when İnönü gave a fiery speech at the annual convention of the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*), an organization of mostly intellectuals that served as a hotbed of Turkish nationalism. In his remarks, the Prime Minister emphasized the need for everybody in Turkey to speak Turkish. The government was going to transform all those who lived inside Turkey into Turks, “no matter what happens.”<sup>243</sup> A British diplomatic correspondence from 1934 noted that Arabs, Circassians, Cretan Muslims, and Kurds in the country were being targeted for not speaking Turkish, and in many provinces people who spoke different languages and dialects were fined and even as many as hundreds were arrested.<sup>244</sup>

However, the usage of terms such as “Kurd, Laz, Circassian, Kurdistan and Lazistan” was banned in 1925 with the proclamation of the Ministry of Education, long before the “speak Turkish Campaign” and the declaration of the new Turkish alphabet on 1 November 1928. The army and the conscription

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>243</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 25.

<sup>244</sup> Cagaptay, “Race, Assimilation and Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40, no.3 (2004): 95.



system was an efficient school for Turkification. “Kurdish soldiers who were sent to western Anatolia” were “taught to read and write Turkish.” Accordingly, these people were being “turned into good Turks.”<sup>245</sup>

The idea of resettlement and the resettlement law of 1934 were used as an important element to create a homogeneous nation. Then Prime Minister Sukru Saracoglu commented about the law; “The assimilation of these immigrants (Balkan and Caucasus immigrants) is one of the goals of this law.”<sup>246</sup> Within the implementation of the law, the population was divided into a class system, with ethnic Muslim Turks regarded as the primary group. Then the second group was regarded as not speaking Turkish, but belonging to Turkish culture (especially Circassians) who were considered Turkish but “whose Turkishness in terms of language and culture needs to be enhanced by resettlement policies.”<sup>247</sup> Also, an official report by the temporary committee for the resettlement law, dated on 27 May 1934, cited Albanians, Circassians, and Abkhazians as examples of Muslim groups that failed to integrate into the Turkish nation.<sup>248</sup>

An executive act from the 1930s, “Circular on the Speedy Disposal of Resettlement and Population Matters” (Iskan ve Nüfus Islerinin Süratle İkmali Hakkında Tamim) established five hierarchical categories among the immigrants, similar to previous classifications. The first was ethnic Turks, who were to receive their documents immediately. The second group included Crimean Tatars and Karapapaks, who were welcome since they were ethnically related to Turks. The third category comprised Balkan Muslims: Pomaks and Bosnians. The fourth category comprised the Circassians. The last category comprised Kurds, Arabs,

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<sup>245</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 23.

<sup>246</sup> Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices,” 5.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 95.

Jews, and Christians.<sup>249</sup> Thus, the same committee ordered that the Circassians would receive their identification paper only after having been investigated.<sup>250</sup>

With the development of the Turkish History Thesis in the 1930s, Turkish nationalism became “rationalized” and the synthesis that Ziya Gokalp was trying to achieve between Islam and westernization was abandoned in favor of a radical interpretation of “laicism.”<sup>251</sup> By order of Mustafa Kemal in 1932, the first Turkish History Congress was organized mainly with the contribution of teachers and intellectuals.<sup>252</sup> The Congress ended with the declaration of the “Turkish *History Thesis*” and the official view of what constituted Turkishness: Race, ethnicity, and a long glorious history were the tripods of Turkishness; second, only people who spoke Turkish would be eligible for membership to the nation; and third, religion was deemed irrelevant for defining Turkishness.<sup>253</sup> With all these achievements the position of the ethnically different groups tried to be harmonizing within Turkishness.

With the rise of Communism in the Soviet Union, a watchful attitude against the Circassians also played a significant role during the 1930s. For example, the government ordered, on 2 November 1937, that refugees from the Soviet Union were not admitted into Turkey; in case of a *fait accompli*, those who managed to enter the country were to be “resettled at least 50 kilometers away from the Soviet border.”<sup>254</sup>

## **E. CIRCASSIAN ELITE**

The role of the Circassian elite within the creation of the republic was significant and proportionately high. The leadership cadres of the national

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>251</sup> Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation*, 18

<sup>252</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 50.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 97.

resistance were mostly figures from the late Ottoman era. During the national resistance three groups were important: The first was the politically active military officers, such as Ali Fuat Cebesoy, Kazım Karabekir, İsmet İnönü, Refet Bele, Deli Halit, Seyfi Düzgören, Kazım Özalp, and Cefer Tayyar Eğilmez. The second group was composed of CUP party bosses, such as *Yenibağçeli* Nail, Mazhar Mufit Kansu, Celal Bayar, and *Filibeli* Hilmi. And, the third group was the members of the former *fedaiin* from the Special Organization.<sup>255</sup> The number of Circassians among the commanders of the resistance and their role in the creation of Turkey were remarkably high: Halit, Ali Fuat, Refet and Rauf were all members of immigrant families from the Caucasus. For example, when Mustafa Kemal was igniting the national resistance movement at Samsun on 19 May 1919, Circassian descent former Navy Minister Huseyin Rauf Orbay, who had close relations with the head of the Karakol Kara Vasif,<sup>256</sup> was visiting Special Organization veterans in the western parts of the country and making Special Organization arms caches available for the resistance.<sup>257</sup>

Rauf Orbay was among the first activist to take part in the planning and organization phase of the National Forces, especially in the western parts of the country.<sup>258</sup> Especially, Rauf Orbay played a significant role in the recruitment of Circassians to support the efforts of the regular army with regional paramilitary forces. Many Circassian officers served during the crucial stage of the War of Independence, both as commanders and recruiters.<sup>259</sup> At the end of the war in 1922, the Turkish Grand National Assembly awarded eleven North Caucasians, out of twenty recipients, the honorific title of veteran (*gazi*).<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 105.

<sup>256</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 172.

<sup>257</sup> Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 105.

<sup>258</sup> Gingeras, "The Sons of Two Fatherlands," 6.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 155.

The participation of the Circassians in the Sivas Congress, on the way to the War of Independence, is significantly more than the other representatives. “Out of a possible 38 men who joined the gathering, twelve were of North Caucasian decent.”<sup>261</sup> Circassians also provided security for Mustafa Kemal and the other participants on their way from Amasya to Erzurum and then Sivas. At the behest of Rauf Orbay, a small unit was prepared under the command of two Circassian commanders, Semsettin Sulara and Osman Onarak, and was ordered to protect Mustafa Kemal whatever the cost.<sup>262</sup> In a similar fashion, Emin Marsan Pasha, the paramilitary leader of the Sivas region, assured Mustafa Kemal that the congress in Sivas would be held without any disruptions.<sup>263</sup> At end of the congress stage, when Mustafa Kemal reached Ankara with representatives of the Anatolia (Heyet-i Temsiliye), five out of eleven representatives were also Circassians.<sup>264</sup> The number of Circassians in the first Turkish Grand National Assembly on 23 April 1920 was in lieu of their previous contributions: 25 out of 120 representatives were Circassians.<sup>265</sup>

#### **F. PARA-MILITARISM AND THE CERKES ETHEM AFFAIR**

Para-militarism is an important issue within themes of violence and identity in modern Turkey. Circassians played definitive roles to defy as well as cooperate with the CUP and the nationalist movement in Western Anatolia. They have been known for their courage and warrior instincts throughout history. However, there are some instances that blemish this courage, and even until today, this stigmatization has caused negative approaches towards the

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<sup>261</sup> Gingeras, “The Sons of Two Fatherlands,” 6 ; Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 176. The twelve Circassians were Rauf Orbay (Abkhazian), Bekir Sami Kunduk (Ossetian), Hakki Behic (Adyge), Ibrahim Sureyya (Abkhazian), Emir Marsan Pasha (Abkhazian), Hikmet Bey (Abkazan), Omer Mumtaz Tanbay (Kabardin), Muzaffer Kilic (Abkhazian), Osman Niri Tufan (Dagestan), Osman Bey (Abkhazian), Yusuf Bey (Adyge) and Kamil Polat (Kabardin).

<sup>262</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 174.

<sup>263</sup> Gingeras, “The Sons of Two Fatherlands,” 7.

<sup>264</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 179.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 180.

Circassians. The notorious events of Circassian involvements date back to the early years of Circassian existence within the Ottoman Empire.

On 5 June 1876, ex-Sultan Abdülaziz committed suicide. Then, on 15 June, a Circassian army captain called Hasan, motivated by personal hatred, shot and killed Hüseyin Avni Pasha, Minister of Foreign Affairs Resit Pasha, and several others during a cabinet meeting. This event was linked to the vague statement of the Imperial Degree (*Hattı Humayun*) and later changed the balance of power in favor of more radical reforms in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>266</sup> In a similar fashion, in 1889, the first organized opposition to the Ottoman administration was ignited in the Military Medical College under the name of Ittihad-i Osmani Cemiyeti (Ottoman Unity Society), which aimed to reinstate the constitution and parliament. The founders of this opposition were four Albanians, a Kurd, and a Circassian.<sup>267</sup>

Similar to previous events, in April 1876, in the aftermath of a Christian uprising in Bosnia, Bulgarian nationalists based in Romania and Russia organized a rebellion to the south of the Danube, which was suppressed by the Ottomans with the help of militias (the so-called *Bashibozuks*). These irregular forces constituted mostly Circassians, many of whom were resettled in the area after they were chased from the Caucasus by the Russians a decade earlier.<sup>268</sup>

On 2 August 1903 (Ilinden or St. Elijah's Day) the central government in the Macedonia province of Manastir exploded in rebellion that was organized by the guerillas under the name of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO). Throughout the southern regions of the Manastir, Greek and Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire were exposed to the violence of the

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<sup>266</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 73.

<sup>267</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 86.

<sup>268</sup> Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 287.

VMRO. In response, Ottoman forces again used *basibozuks* or irregular forces to suppress the violence, and many local landless and unemployed men joined these local fighters.<sup>269</sup>

As in the Abdülhamid's era, the politics of Muslim solidarity held a special attraction for the large immigrant communities, especially from the Balkans and the Caucasus, who considered themselves victims of religiously inspired persecution. That is why shared Muslim identity was a perfect path towards integration of these groups, and it should thus cause no surprise that immigrants, especially Circassians, were so prominent among the CUP militants (especially in the so-called 'Special Organization,' the *Teskilat-i Mahsusa*).<sup>270</sup>

Elite officers rose in the Ottoman military schools, such as Enver, Kâzım, Fethi, and Mustafa Kemal, clearly established a separate subgroup, but at the same time bonds of friendship, often based on a shared history as classmates, tied them personally to lower-ranking officers. These ties were mobilized most spectacularly by Enver at the start of World War I, when he created the Special organization (*Teskilat-i Mahsusa*) out of the loosely defined group known as the *fedaiin* (volunteers). Some officers volunteered also for this undercover organization and participated in the war of Tripolitania in 1911 against the Italians, and one year later, during the Balkan War, they were charged with setting up a guerrilla movement, and even an ostensibly independent Muslim republic in Western Thrace. They would later play important roles with the persecution of the political figures. A great deal of literature has been written about this group; however, it has exposed very little about the background of most of its members, people such as *Kuşçubasızade* Esref, *Sapançalı* Hakkı, Yakup Cemil, *Izmitli* Mümtaz, or *Çerkes* Resit. It is known that members of the

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<sup>269</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 57.

<sup>270</sup> Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 277.

one-million-strong Circassian émigrés in the Ottoman Empire, the children and grandchildren of nineteenth century refugees from the Caucasus, played a key role in this group.<sup>271</sup>

The Special Organization was famous for its personal networks.<sup>272</sup> At the top of the organization, there were powerful individuals and families, such as Rauf Orbay, Cerkes Resit, and Esref Kuscubasi. These people were also responsible for recruitments from the less distinguished Circassians.<sup>273</sup>

This underground network was also influential in the post-war period and the preparation phase of the Republic for the War of Independence. Members of the organization, especially those of Circassian origin, seem to have formed the backbone of these networks. The most important of the networks was *Karakol* (The Guard), founded in October 1918 with the order of Enver and Talât Pashas. *Karakol* was ordered to recruit and maintain pre-existing Muslim gangs in the Izmit region and eventually with the help of personal connections the *Karakol* started to control a wide range of territory starting from Izmit to Istanbul.<sup>274</sup> This network smuggled significant amounts of weaponry and equipment as well as a large number of people to Anatolia during the period between November 1918 and March 1920. According to the memoirs of Halide Edip, *Karakol* managed to steal 320 machine guns, 1,500 rifles, one artillery gun, 200 boxes of ammunition, and 10,000 uniforms from the depots of the invading forces, and they managed to transport these weapons to the National Resistant Forces.<sup>275</sup> Many of those smuggled to Anatolia were people who brought vital skills to the emerging resistance movement, but who could also be expected to be arrested for alleged

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<sup>271</sup> Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 102.

<sup>272</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 63.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 70.

<sup>275</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 162.

war crimes. In 1919–20, *Karakol* also nursed political ambitions, trying to determine the course of the national resistance in Anatolia and establish independent relations with the Bolsheviks.<sup>276</sup>

Besides their significant contribution to the underground structure, Circassians were considered to be the seminal actors of the Ottoman state structure,<sup>277</sup> and later played a definitive role with the cooperating Committee and Union and Progress (CUP) and the Nationalist Movement.<sup>278</sup> Also, Mustafa Kemal realized their courage and independent characteristics and tried to use them as important force multipliers of the Turkish Independence War. Especially, he saw the Circassians as a community in Anatolia that preserved their unity as a different entity, and this entity should be part of the War of Independence.<sup>279</sup> The regular Army units were so weak that, until 1921, the nationalists had to rely on bands of Turkish and Circassian irregulars for resistance to the Greek invaders in the Western part of the country.<sup>280</sup>

However, later this band structure, in the western part of Anatolia, became a significant problem for the new republic, and played an important subtext within the definition of identity. While Mustafa Kemal was utilizing the band structure, the Istanbul government also tried to organize armed resistance against the Nationalists, with the support of the British. They used exactly the same kind of bands of irregulars as the Nationalists, and the Circassian gang leader Ahmet Anzavur was one of the most influential leaders in the region of Balıkesir. Yet, they were suppressed by another band led by another Circassian influential figure, Cerkes Ethem, on behalf of the Nationalists.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 332.

<sup>277</sup> Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores*, 3.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>279</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 168.

<sup>280</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 149.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 152.



Based on the Islamic, anti-imperialist, anti-western, corporatist, and socialist ideas, the Green Army (Yesil Ordu) was established in May of 1920 with the approval of Mustafa Kemal. It was not a real regular army, but a political organization designed to improve morale within the Nationalist structure and to support the activities of the Ottoman Sultan who operated under the name of 'Army of the Caliphate.' Rauf Orbay had a significant importance with the creation of this army and himself established first contact with Ethem and his brothers Tevfik and Resit. He described them as the previous Special Operation Agents, and partisan fighting experts.<sup>282</sup> Ethem and his *cetes*, composed of nearly 3,000 volunteers, played a significant role against the 30,000-strong Greek forces, and caused a huge amount of casualties to them.<sup>283</sup> When Ethem came to the Turkish Grand National Assembly, he was welcomed as a national hero, and including Mustafa Kemal every member showed their gratitude to Ethem with a long standing ovation.<sup>284</sup> Then, he was ordered to suppress the anti-Kemalist uprising in Yozgat.

When Çerkez Ethem, at the head of his Circassian fighters, joined the Green Army, it became a force to be reckoned with and a potential threat, which later forced Mustafa Kemal to disband it in July. But, the radicals in the organization reorganized as the *Halk Zümresi* (People's Faction) the same month. Mustafa Kemal reacted by gathering a number of people he trusted from among the People's Faction to found an officially approved "communist" party (*Türkiye Komünist Fırkası*), which was tightly controlled by people close to himself.<sup>285</sup>

Mustafa Kemal took steps to crush this left-wing movement in January of 1921 by ordering Çerkez Ethem to disband his troops and allow them to be integrated into the regular army. When Ethem refused, troops were sent against

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<sup>282</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 186.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>284</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 200.

<sup>285</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey; A Modern History*, 157.

him. On 27 December 1920 Inonu and his troops defeated the Ethem forces, took most of the members as prisoner, and Ethem himself fled and went over to the Greek side.<sup>286</sup> With the strong arm of the left thus cut off, Mustafa Kemal dissolved the Popular Socialists.<sup>287</sup>

The Circassians did not welcome the Kemalist policy after the creation of the Republic, and it created disappointment among the non-Turkish Muslims in Turkey, since it encouraged the creation of Turkishness as a new nationalist idea.<sup>288</sup> The speech of Inonu, just after the Said rebellion, increased the tension between minorities in Turkey. He mentioned that: “Compared with the ethnic Turks, no other nationality is important for us. Our goal is to make everybody Turk who lives in this Turk homeland. Whoever opposes this idea will be cut off from this state.”<sup>289</sup> The propaganda activities of the group Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*) helped the creation of Turkishness, and activities of state-sponsored organizations were not welcomed among Circassians. For many Circassians, Muslim identity was still an important factor for their connection with the state, and its dissolution with the ban of The Caliphate in 1924 shook relations with the new state.

The Cerkes Ethem affair has turned out to be important in the narratives of Circassians in Turkey, due to the ways this historical event is represented in history books and media. Despite Ethem’s uprising and seeking refuge in Greece, most Circassians remained loyal to the Kemalists. Yet, the republic explained Ethem’s treason through his national origin.<sup>290</sup> This event was an elimination of the local guerilla forces in favor the regular army in 1920s during Turkey’s War of Independence; however, it is attributed to all Circassians. Even

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<sup>286</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 209.

<sup>287</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 157.

<sup>288</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 244.

<sup>289</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 245.

<sup>290</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 113.

Mustafa Kemal, in his famous speech Nutuk, mentioned little about Ethem's help during the War of Independence and stressed about his traitorous activities.<sup>291</sup>

## **G. NATIONALISM AFTER MUSTAFA KEMAL**

During the 1930s, Circassians and other ethnic minorities in Turkey suffered a lot under the homogenization policies and the stigma of being a "traitor nation" in the minds of the subsequent ruling elite.

The Minorities are rapidly disappearing as entities. This program of Minorities is essentially the latest phase of a conflict between the radically opposed political ideals; Ottomanism or federation of the heterogeneous, and Turkish or homogenous nationalism. The idea of nationalism and the idea of the race are the ideas of new Turkey.<sup>292</sup>

No Matter what happens, it is our obligation to immerse those living in our society in the civilization of Turkish society and to have them benefit from the prosperity of civilization. Why should we still speak of the Kurd Mehmet, the Circassian Hasan or the Laz Ali. This would demonstrate the weakness of the dominant element...If anybody has any difference inside of him, we need to erase that in the schools and in the body politic, so that man will be as Turkish as me and serve the homeland.<sup>293</sup>

In 1931 the CHP party program started to create definitions for the Nationalist concept. First, it described the "millet" (nation) as a "social and political community of citizens connected to one another through language, culture, and ideals."<sup>294</sup> This asserted that becoming Turkish was primarily cultural-linguistic, and then voluntaristic.<sup>295</sup> Recep Peker, of Circassian descent,

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<sup>291</sup> Avagyan, *Cerkesler*, 256.

<sup>292</sup> From a US diplomatic memorandum dispatched from Istanbul, December 1938, In Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>293</sup> This is an excerpt from a speech from Sukru Kaya, then Minister of the Interior, in a speech before the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1934 cited in Ryan Gingeras, "The Sons of Two Fatherlands: Turkey and the North Caucasian Diaspora, 1914–1923," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], Complete List, 2011, Online since 30 November 2011, Connection on 03 November 2013, 1. <http://ejts.revues.org/4424>

<sup>294</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 44.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

also spoke about the non-Turkish Muslims' position *vis-à-vis* the nation, ignoring linguistic differences with them, and arguing instead that they could be considered Turks:

We accept those citizens in the contemporary Turkish political and social community, as part of us, those citizens who accepted the ideas such as Kurdism, Circassianism, and even Lazeism and Pomakism. It is our duty to correct these false conceptions [among them]. (Recep Peker, CHF Programının İzahı, 7)<sup>296</sup>

While Kemalism acted more harshly to assimilate the Kurds, it used more benign means toward the lesser Muslim minorities, such as Circassians. The new government watched non-Turkish Muslim groups with caution and monitored any nationalist activities, which was usually called a cultural policy. First, the government banned publications in different languages. Then, on 9 June 1932, it outlawed the entry of a Circassian primer in Latin characters into Turkey. Also, the government banned national Circassian publications, such as "The Caucasus Quarterly," a Circassian journal published in Paris.<sup>297</sup>

On 14 August 1935, the British government informed Ambassador Loraine that, according to some intelligence, a terrorist group mostly composed of Kurdish minorities would assassinate the Turkish president. When the Turkish government learned about the report, it issued an alert about this issue to its local authorities. Ankara also noted that a band of Circassian assassins from Trans-Jordan, and an Armenian from Athens would enter Turkey to join these efforts.<sup>298</sup>

Consequently, the Republic became extremely wary toward the Circassian diaspora in Turkey. The government started to follow suspicious Circassians, both in Turkey and in other diaspora countries. For example, Ankara requested information from the Syrian government about the activities of the Circassian Sadettin, and in Turkey, it requested information from the governor of Izmir about

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>297</sup> Çagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 113.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 114.

“Circassian Kemal Rıza.”<sup>299</sup> Similarly, on 5 September 1935, Ankara asked the governors of Kocaeli, Balıkesir, Aydın, and Çanakkale to report their estimate of “firearms in the hands of civilians, especially in those areas, populated by the Lazs, Georgians, Abkhazes, Lezgis, and Circassians.”<sup>300</sup>

## H. EXTREME NATIONALISM IN TURKEY AND CIRCASSIANS

The role of ethnic identity within the imagined binding term of “Turkish National Identity” was suppressed until the democratization movements in the 1960s. Generally, they have been situated at different societal levels. Ethnicity has been observed through “minority” cultures, whereas nationalism has been interpreted through state ideology. While all minorities are represented under the terms of Ottoman Muslims during the late years of the Ottoman Empire, the Kemalist nationalist definition did not include ethnic groups during the first decades of the Republic. Hence, national identity was structured by banning the use of ethnic languages and banning the demonstration of ethnic cultural figures in the community.

Extreme nationalism started to emerge as a Nationalist movement in the 1930s with the Turkish Hearths, and was later politicized in the 1960s as the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP*). The first founders were Huseyin Nihal Atsız, Rıza Ögür Türkkan, Zeki Velidi Togan, and others who embraced the racial idea of Turkishness. This group defined Turkish nationalism based on the Turkish race rather than the previous definitions of Ottomanism, Muslim identity, and the lingua-cultural definition of Turkish identity. For Nihal Atsız, Turkish nation means Turkish race, and he defined this idea in 1931:

Then what is a nation? We should first accept this: According to us there is only Turkish nation...For Turks nationalism is foremost a blood issue. The person who would say I am Turk should be from the Turkish descent...But a person with foreign blood even if s/he does know any language other than Turkish, s/he is not a Turk....The person whose form looks Turkish is not also Turkish....It

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 115.

is necessary to avoid those who resemble to the Turks in form more. As it is known, the most dangerous of the snakes is the one that has the same color with its setting. ....But they either know or sense that their blood is different. This is why I call them like-Turks (Türkümsü)...We can state hundreds of examples on how Türkümsüs harm the Turk. It is easy to prove this historically:...why did Abdullah Cevdet try to destroy the notions of nation and religion? Because he was a Kurdish nationalist...Why did Rıza Tevfik betray the country? Because he was a hybrid with an Albanian father and Circassian mother. Why did Ali Kemal work for the enemy? Because his grandfather was a converted Armenian. Why did ceteci Ethem unite with the Greeks? Because he was a Circassian...The defect in their blood makes them do that. Therefore, their treasons should be considered natural.<sup>301</sup>

Thus, many non-Turkish ethnic groups were regarded as those that looked like Turks, yet they were ethnically different and they were the real threat to the Republic. This idea also rejected the Turanist definition of Ziya Gökalp of the Republican era, as well as the previous Muslim identity until the idea of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis”<sup>302</sup> in the 1960s with Alparslan Türkeş, founder of the MHP.

Since treason was associated with non-Turkish ethnic groups, they were all considered responsible for the failure of the Ottoman state and for attempts to resist the new Republic. Within this narrative, the idea of “Grey Wolves” emerged, and the popular idea among the Grey Wolves that “only Turks can help the Turks, and there is no friend for Turks but the Turks” emerged as the popular nationalist narrative in Turkey.

During the 1930s, there were different narratives about the Circassians in Turkey; some defined them as Turks, and some placed them into the category of internal enemy. While the Kemalist government was committed to the creation of a new national identity based on the integration of non-Turkish minorities in the Republic, it also stayed cautious towards them. On the other hand, in December

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<sup>301</sup> Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, “Türk Irkı=Türk Milleti,” accessed on 03 November 2013, <http://www.nihal-atsiz.com/yazi/turk-irki-turk-milleti-h-nihal-atsiz.html>.

<sup>302</sup> E. Burak Arıkan, “Turkish Ultra Nationalist under Review: A Study of the Nationalist Action Party,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 8(3) (2002): 358.

1938, the then Interior Minister Refik Saydam wrote: “Unconstitutional phrases such as ‘...is being investigated as a member of the Circassian race...’ have been attracting our attention. The Circassians are Turkish citizens and are Turks by race.”<sup>303</sup>

General Fevzi Cakmak, Ataturk’s fellow soldier, founded the Republican Peasant-Nation Party (Cumhuriyetci Koylu Millet Partisi, CKMP) in 1948. The first party program was based on the corporatist, developmental, and modern ideology that Ataturk used to define the baselines. In 1965, Alparslan Turkes was elected as the party chair, and anti-communist rhetoric eventually became the main party ideology under the Nine Lights Doctrine (Dokuz Isik Doktrini, DID) accepted in 1967. The same year, Turkes publicly declared the extremist statement, “Whoever joins the cause and then becomes a traitor, kill him.”<sup>304</sup> Also he quoted from Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf* in many of his speeches.<sup>305</sup> Thus, many writers place the party into the fascist group.

The idea of Turkishness was more of an encompassing term for Alparslan Turkes; he refused the ethnic differences in Turkey starting from the 1940s. With the trials of 1944, the Turkist political movement was transformed from a political doctrine to a political opposition and located vis-à-vis Kemalist nationalism. Strangely, the members of the court were non-Turkish and Alparslan Turkes stated on this issue that:

The files of Turkism, Turanism was now delivered to a Circassian and an Albanian. Leading them is a son of an Arab...Ismail Berkok was a Circassian and he was not a random one. He wrote books on this nation and studied a lot. What would become the result? ...were we now in the hands of Albanians, Circassians, Arabs?

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<sup>303</sup> Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, 157.

<sup>304</sup> E. Burak Arikan, “Turkish Ultra Nationalist under Review,” 358.

<sup>305</sup> Daniele Ganser, *NATO’s Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 226.

...the incident showed that neither Alkan is Albanian, nor Berkok is Circassian and Erden is Arab. All three of them are the Turkish children of Turkey and they are Turkish generals.<sup>306</sup>

The rise of right-wing extremism in Turkey led to repression of the Circassians, although the political atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s was more relaxed than the 1930s. Although there are many different features to define right-wing extremism, five of them (nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democratic sentiment, and support for a strong state)<sup>307</sup> are considered the basic features by many right-wing writers; these features correspond to the MHP's DID, which is based on nationalism, idealism, moralism, communitarianism, positivism, ruralism, libertarianism and character building, modernization and populism, and industrialism.<sup>308</sup>

Turkish nationalism defined DID as "the love of Turkish nation, and loyalty and service to the Turkish state;" and sacrificing themselves for the well-being of the national community is depicted as the primary mission of citizens in the party agenda.<sup>309</sup> DID's doctrine of party was based on the glorification of Turkish history and traditions. This is why his definition of nation is not an ethnic definition. Yet his emphasis on not having "the aspiration or pretension for any other nation in his heart" automatically excludes any diasporic formation, or any long-distance politics. The famous slogan of the party, as the signifier of the expulionist policy, "love or leave the country" reveals the goal of creating a sterile society. Turkes added more to the definition and stated that, "...our nationalism means Turkism. Ideologically, this means conforming in all spheres to the Turkish spirit and traditions and to assistance to all Turks and the Turkish nation in everything."<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Tanil Bora, "Türkiye'de Milliyetçilik ve Azınlıklar," *Birikim* 71–72 (1995): 41.

<sup>307</sup> Poul Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 68.

<sup>308</sup> E. Burak Arikan, "The Programme of the Nationalist Action Party of Turkey: An Iron Hand in a Velvet Glove?" *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 4 (1998): 120.

<sup>309</sup> E. Burak Arikan, "Turkish Ultra-Nationalists under Review," 368.

<sup>310</sup> Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Cressent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 147.



Although it is not clearly mentioned in any party documents, racist ideas are deeply structured in the rhetoric of some party members and supporters. Muhsin Yazicioglu, an avid supporter of racist superiority and later a founder of the second right-wing extremist party—Great Unity Party—in Turkey, wrote that, “We firmly believe in the theory of superior race...Turkishness is an essence comprised of religion and race...the Turkish race is more precious than all others.”<sup>311</sup> A pamphlet distributed to Turkish workers in Germany by MHP prior to the 1977 elections showed that there was a clear racist hatred of minorities. It stated that,

Those who have destroyed (The Ottoman Empire) were Greek-Armenian-Jewish converts, Kurds, Circassians, Bosnians, and Albanians. As a Turk, how much longer will you tolerate these dirty minorities? Throw out the Circassian, that he may go to Caucasia, throw out the Armenian, throw out and kill Kurd, purge from your midst the enemy of all Turkdom.<sup>312</sup>

During the 1970s, two political platforms began to revive: The revolutionaries (Devrimci) believed the social movement in Turkey would be the best route to secure Circassians rights, and the returnists (Donuscu) favored repatriation to the North Caucasus. The Devrimci movement eventually lost its support but the Donuscu idea is still active. The 1980 military coup resulted in a new wave of repatriation talk as a favorable topic among Circassians. Later events in the Soviet Union would soon make repatriation a real possibility for Circassians, yet this time conflict in the region became an impediment for many Circassians in Turkey.<sup>313</sup>

Among this nationalistic discourse there were some features that made the integration of Circassians into the new state structure. First was the concept of Turkish national identity. As long as Circassians identify themselves as a

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>312</sup> Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent*, 153.

<sup>313</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 130.

branch of Turkishness or a part of Turkishness, and even sometimes-hyphenated identities, such as Caucasian-Turks, nationalists considered them as part of Turkishness.

The second factor that connected Circassians to MHP ideology as a political movement was the anti-communist rhetoric of MHP. Throughout the 1960s, the signifier of anti-communism served to provide coherence among the categories of Turkishness, as did being a Sunni Muslim.<sup>314</sup> As far as Circassians were concerned, this anti-communist ideal overlapped with the anti-Russian ideal.

The third important factor that connected Circassians with MHP ideology was the legend of Turanism inherited from the Ottoman Empire, based on the creation of geographically larger Turkic communities. The operations of Enver Pasha in the North Caucasus during World War I, and the support of the Ottoman Empire by the Republic of the Northern Caucasus are the instances where Turanism and Circassian nationalism overlapped. Within this concept of Turanism, Circassians from time to time were regarded as an extension of Turkic communities in Russia, as part of the “oppressed peoples.”

The fourth factor that was parallel between MHP ideology and Circassian nationalism is the concept of loyalty. Loyalty to the state structure and promotion of a strong state ideology is the ideological legacy of the Ottoman Empire to Turkish nationalism. Similarly, Circassians since the nineteenth century have been associated with the Ottoman and later Turkish state as loyal soldiers and bureaucrats. Stigmatizing Cerkes Ethem and the association of the “cerkes” to the entire community was an exception that needed to be erased from the memories for the Circassians. Thus, going hand-in-hand with nationalist discourse was important for Circassians.

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<sup>314</sup> Mesut Yegen, “Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (1) (2007): 133.

The threat of non-Turkish ethnic identifications and the fear that other groups would follow Kurdish nationalism *vis-à-vis* the Turkish nation have become general themes in Turkish nationalist discourse. In this context, Circassians are either regarded as the “loyal element” or as “the next” ethnic group that tends to follow the Kurds, and hence, betray the Turkish nation and state. However, the current trend in Turkey and the demands of the Circassians from the state are limited mostly on a cultural perspective, and the heads of the associations have reiterated their loyalty to the state in many instances.

#### **I. IDENTITY IN TRANSITION: KEMALISM UNDER STRAIN (1990S AND 2000S)**

Since the creation of the Republic of Turkey, the evolution of Turkish society and politics has been based on Kemalist ideas that were defined by the founder of the republic. In domestic politics, this has meant a strong attachment to the state and the norms of the state defined in the constitution. Both ideas of the Founder and the basics of the constitution paid very little attention to ethnic and religious identity; however, there were different cleavages supporting different approaches to identity based on Turkishness, Ottoman heritage, and Muslim heritage.

On the other front, Turkish policy has turned her face to the western world to reach modern values of civilization as well as economic recovery of the war-torn new country.

The binding forces for the new Turkish Republic were Islam and Turkish nationalism in the 1990s. In reality, it was difficult to distinguish where one phenomenon ended and the other started, because they have had close interactions and interdependence in politics. This policy is still applicable in Turkish politics and has become more prominent with the reducing role of the military in Turkish politics, and is seen by many supporters as a balancing force between Islam and the secular structure of modern Turkey. The rise of the Refah Party in July of 1996 and later the rise of the AKP during the beginning of 2000s

greatly intensified debates about the direction of Turkish democracy. Even if Refah is left out of politics by an act of the Turkish Supreme Constitutional Court, the sentiments that brought Refah and the AKP to power will be a force to be reckoned with in Turkish politics for some time to come.

Another potentially important force for change in Turkish society exists in the form of rising ethnic awareness within Turkish society—most prominently in the Kurdish example. The national revivals are making themselves felt in foreign policy within Turkey's path to the EU, as well as in domestic policy settings with the rise of representation of these groups in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The result of these forces is the deepening identity crisis affecting the process of Turkey in terms of democracy and relations with the West and East.

#### **J. RISE OF THE ISLAM IN MODERN TURKEY (1990S AND 2000S)**

Starting from the 1990s, Turkey has faced the steady rise of Islam as a political force. The rise of Islam goes far beyond the number of headscarves in the streets; it is the rediscovery of Islam as a cultural support, expression of class frustration, expression of economic support, and political outlet.<sup>315</sup>

The main political actors have played an important role in religious revival as a political identity, since the religious vote is simply too high to ignore. Therefore, since the 1950s, leaders such as Erbakan, Ozal, Ciller, Yilmaz, and even Alparslan Turkes reached for the religious card in political rivalry. Especially in the 1990s, the increase of political Islam created questions of the failing of secular structure of the country until 28 February 1997, when the military forced the government out in a deliberate, but indirect fashion—a soft coup.

The current ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP), led by PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has helped consolidate a new dominant national identity that has grown since the mid-1980s, during the reign of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP), led by Turgut

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<sup>315</sup> Ian O. Lesser, *Ethnic and Religious Strains in Turkey: Internal and External Implications* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1997), 2.

Ozal. This dominant national identity reflects the synthesis between Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic histories and culture with its nationalist, secular, Western, modern traditions that the state was founded on by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. This dominant national identity is usually called "neo-Ottoman"<sup>316</sup> or even previous definition of "Turkic-Islamic synthetic" (with more emphasis on the Islamic side). Recently, with its predominantly Muslim population that had once been the epicenter of all Sunni Muslims, Turkey has started to return to its Islamic and Ottoman past, showing a deeper regard for its Muslim culture.<sup>317</sup> "Since Islam lies at the core of the symbolic structure of Turkish society and is the main source of shared moral understanding, Islam is the repository from which Muslim actors draw values, critiques, and judgments."<sup>318</sup>

## K. CONCLUSION

After a detailed examination of the Circassian community within Turkish society, it can be seen that diaspora politics is based on the resistance or strong struggle against the hegemonic community, but also comprises a variety of strategies to sustain identity.

From 1800 to the 1920s there was a serious population change in Anatolia. Many of the immigrants were already Turks in culture and language. Others, such as the Circassians, Bosnians, and Albanians kept many of their ethnic traditions, but became Turkish in language and loyalty. Also, the Russian exodus of Circassians from the North Caucasus created a communal trauma for the immigrated Muslim Circassians in Ottoman lands. Thus, "this confrontation forced the order to treat Islam as an identity of resistance and restructuring."<sup>319</sup> However, they were forced to forget their languages, since the Turkish language

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<sup>316</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism," *Middle East Critique* 7, iss. 12 (1998): 19.

<sup>317</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>318</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 23.

<sup>319</sup> Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, 138.

was seen as one of the most significant binding factors of Kemalist nation-building policy. Eventually many of the immigrants forgot their languages. Even some dialects of the North Caucasian language became extinct, such as the Ubykh dialect.<sup>320</sup> They have become part of Turkish nationalism. However, despite the continuously changing discourse of Turkish nationalism of non-Turkish Muslims, the historical and ideological matrix of Turkish nationalism enabled multiple points of entry for Circassians in social and political life in Turkey.

The relations of Circassians within Turkish society are complex, a constantly reshaped and intermingled situation. However, there are certain things that show Turkish nationalism as a hegemonic concept rather than democratic and egalitarian. Thus, this nationalism has multiple and different discourses within ethnic minorities.

The collective memory of the 21 May 1864 exile is analyzed as the basis of Circassian identity and as a component of contemporary identity with certain cultural characteristics, transmitted over generations. Today, Circassians claim as many rights as other ethno-cultural minority groups without expressing any separatist objectives, expressing their difference basically focused on their culture and their “exile” memory. Identity recognition comes first with these claims, since they, as well as the other minorities, have not expressed their ethnic identities vis-à-vis “Turkishness.”

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<sup>320</sup> The last native speaker of Ubykh, Tevfik Esenç, passed away in 1992, although a handful of linguists still can communicate in Ubykh. In Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 130.

#### **IV. NORTH CAUCASUS ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS IN TURKEY**

After presenting the history of Circassians and their relations with the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey, this part of the thesis will examine the construction of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey, also covering the late Ottoman era, with a special emphasis on the discourse of Circassian associations/organizations and intellectuals from different historical periods in different political contexts. This part is organized as follows: The first part analyzes the Circassian organizations in the Ottoman Era, up to their closure with the declaration of Republic; the second part covers the period from the 1950s to 1980; the third part covers from 1980 to the 2000s; the fourth part examines from the 2000s to the present, while presenting the ideologies of the associations, their aims, programs, publications, and influence over Turkish foreign policy towards the North Caucasus.

Starting from the early days of the “Great Exile” of Circassians to Ottoman lands, two basic ideas have always stayed in the minds of the Circassians. First one is the “returnist” (*Donuscu*) ideology that aims to return to the homeland, and make every effort on behalf of this policy. The supporters of the ideology feel themselves to be guests in host countries that still have considerable Circassian populations. The second basic ideology is the idea of Diaspora (*Kaliscilik*) and living in a different country, embracing the values of the country rather than turning back to the homeland.

Today, the Circassians largely live in the south Marmara region, from Istanbul, to Izmit, Adapazari, Duzce, Bursa, Balikesir, and Canakkale. Another significant group is scattered from the Black Sea coast of Sinop and Samsun to Adana in the southern part of Turkey with specific concentrations in Samsun, Tokat, Yozgat, Sivas, Amasya, Corum, Kayseri and Adana. The associations are also scattered in different parts of the country in similar fashion, and Circassians established their own local associations in each city where they live. The study of

the associations is imperative in order to understand the political diversity and intensity of contemporary Circassian diaspora activism as well as its dynamics. The study shows that the political environment the state provided to the associations, roles of the leaders, and different ideologies among the Circassians are influential for the determinations of the political influence over domestic and foreign policy.

#### **A. CIRCASSIAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE OTTOMAN ERA**

The Circassians did not exist as a distinct ethnic group in Anatolia until their Great Exile, in huge numbers, to Ottoman territories in the 1860s. Especially from that date, Circassian intellectuals played a significant role within the Ottoman elite, and occupied many important positions, especially in the close circle of the Sultan and the military, compared to the other minority groups. However, there were no associations until the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 and the restoration of the 1876 Constitution brought (relatively) more democratic rights. Circassians reacted quickly in this environment by establishing a number of associations such as the Circassian Union and Support Association (*Cerkes Ittihat ve Teavun Cemiyeti* or *CITC*), Caucasian Political Committee (*Şimali Kafkas Cemiyeti* or *SKC*), and Circassian Womens' Mutual Aid Committee (*Çerkes Kadınları Teavün Cemiyeti* or *CKTC*). The basic objective of these early associations was the protection of Circassian culture and its passdown to newer generations, improvement of relations with the homeland, improvement of solidarity among Circassians, improvement of economic conditions for poor Circassians, and organization of “*returnist*” policies to the homeland.<sup>321</sup> In short, protection of the North Caucasus identity by fostering social solidarity was the main target of the associations, for which they had carried out intense activities.<sup>322</sup> However, all these association were closed down and the publications were banned upon declaration of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

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<sup>321</sup> Erol Taymaz, “Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri,” In *Türkiye’de Sivil Toplum ve Milliyetçilik* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2001), 451.

<sup>322</sup> Mitat Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 427.



Among these organizations, the British Army closed down the SKC after the Armistice of Moudros in 1918, and the rest had to stop their activities in 1923 with the establishment of the Republic.<sup>323</sup>

The Circassians were planning to execute an efficient and effective route of reform for years and to spread the history of their language, culture, and identity to the world. With the establishment of the Second Constitution of the Ottoman Empire on 23 July 1908,<sup>324</sup> freedom of thought and speech amplified among the Circassians. Prior to the official date of its founding, in August 1908 Gazi Mehmet Pasha, the son of Imam Shamil, laid the foundation of the CITC in Kosha, Istanbul, with the participation of over 100 members at the first meeting.<sup>325</sup> Many of the attendees were historical and intellectual figures of the time (including, but not limited to, people such as Ahmet Cavit Therket Pasha, Marshal Merted Abdullah Pasha, Marshal Berzeg Zeki Pasha, Gazi Muhammad Fazıl Pasha, General Pooh Nazmi Pasha, General Shaplı Osman Pasha, Loh Ahmet Hamdi Pasha, Met Çunatuko Izzet Pasha, Ismail Berkok, Ahmet Mithat Efendi and Professor Aziz Meker).<sup>326</sup> Ahmet Cavit Therket Pasha was elected chairman of the society and remained in office until his death in 1916. After the enactment of the Law of Associations on 16 August 1908, sufficient legal structure was provided in the Ottoman Empire, and on 4 November 1908 the CITC was officially founded in Koska, Istanbul (later moved to Aksaray, Istanbul (1913–1917), Sariguzel Fatih and finally Divanyolu, Istanbul).<sup>327</sup> The CITC was the first of its kind, reflecting the transition taking place for Circassian awareness and equality. The by-laws of the society explained the goals of securing religious,

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<sup>323</sup> Sevda Alakus, Erol Taymaz, "The Formation of a Circassian Diaspora in Turkey," 4.

<sup>324</sup> Elmas Zeynep Arslan, "Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire (1908–1923)," PhD dissertation (Istanbul: Bogazici University, 2008), 27.

<sup>325</sup> Arslan, "Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire," 28.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>327</sup> Samsun Birlesik Kafkasya Dernegi, "Çerkes İttihat ve Teavün Cemiyeti (Çerkes Birleşme ve Yardımlaşma Derneği)," accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://www.samsunbkd.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=203:çerkes-ittihat-ve-teavün-cemiyeti-çerkes-birleşme-ve-yardımlaşma-derneği](http://www.samsunbkd.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=203:çerkes-ittihat-ve-teavün-cemiyeti-çerkes-birleşme-ve-yardımlaşma-derneği)

moral and civil relations among the Circassians. Furthermore, it defined the terms and vision to ensure advancement of Circassians socially and economically. Article 2 of the by-laws states the main objective of the society:

securing religious, moral and civil relations among the Circassians and, moreover, building commercial, agricultural and industrial relations to ensure advancement in financial and social terms and researching and studying past and today of the Circassians in terms of history, language, and traditions.<sup>328</sup>

The CITC were attempting to gain a closer relationship with the government in hopes of solving the conflict correlating with their society, and aiming to “follow Islam and live with other communities in a brotherly manner.”<sup>329</sup>

Interestingly enough, the diversity in personalities often led to differing opinion on serious matters such as supporting the palace or denying its reign. For example, Dr. Mehmet Resid (one of the founders of the CUP) and Tahir Hayrettin, who were elected Parliament Members in the 1908 elections, opposed the CITC’s policies and resigned their obligations to the CITC, as well as publishing journals such as *Sehrah* and *Tanzimat*.<sup>330</sup>

During the years of 1908 to 1923, The CITC demonstrated initiative and success in most of its attempts. The members of the association first aimed to end Circassian slavery, the system of which operated in a feudal society of classes broken into princes, feudal aristocrats, free villagers, and slaves. They sent letters to the Grand Vizier and Ministry of Internal Affairs to find a solution, and on the other hand tried to influence public opinion by releasing articles and journals about slavery.<sup>331</sup> Prohibition of the Circassian slave trade was enacted on 25 May 1911, breaking a decades-long bind on its people.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Çerkes İttihâd ve Te’âvün Cem’iyyeti Nizâm-nâme-i Esâsiyesi, 15 Kanûnisânî 1324, article 2. In Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 27–35.

<sup>329</sup> Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 40.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 34–35.

<sup>331</sup> Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 44.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

The CITC started to publish a newspaper called Gûâze (meaning “guide”) on 2 April 1911, and offered further historical material on Circassians.<sup>333</sup> The purpose of Gûâze was mentioned in the first issue with a short essay titled “*Our Profession*.” In this essay, The CITC proclaimed its message and purpose: “*to promote peace, fraternity and union among different components of the Ottoman Empire, and thus to serve for our honored and sacred country with the help of the God.*”<sup>334</sup> This publication reached all the main Circassian populated areas of the time such as Syria, Jordan, and Caucasia. The most outstanding of its articles were written by gentlemen with the anonymous name of Don Quixote; much of the paper’s material remained anonymous. Fundamental topics such as social deportation, slavery, and the alphabet were discussed, and eventually the publication only printed in the Circassian language. The association was encouraging education and knowledge to its people through articles and postings. Readers’ letters would often be released to the public, giving the culture a voice and a hope. Petitions and even articles demanding the abolishment of slavery made the newspaper extremely significant during these times. Gûâze continued to print until 1914 and in total released fifty-eight issues.<sup>335</sup>

The CITC was able to make massive improvements on the already existing efforts to create a Circassian alphabet. There were different presentations of proposed systems to the designated alphabet commission. The first of its significance was the one prepared mostly of Arabic letters by Met Izzet Pasha. Doctor Mehmet Ali Pçihaluk introduced a whole new system with its own unique structure. The association created its own versions of the alphabet comprised mostly of Latin. These variations of alphabetical systems sparked debate over whether or not it should contain more Latin or Arabic influence. In an

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>334</sup> Guaze, No.1, 2 April 1911, 1, in Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 56.

<sup>335</sup> Hasan Duman, “Osmanli-Turk Sureli Yayinlari ve Gazeteleri, 1828–1928,” (Ankara: Enformasyon ve dokumantasyon Hizmetleri Vakfi, 2000), V.1, 323, In Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 53.

effort to mediate the two parties, the association decided to combine the two styles of both languages. This created confusion and the inability to follow through with a designated system, leading to less and less popularity. Despite the people's sincere effort to spread this alphabet it failed due to grammar issues and political limitations. Although this CITC did not establish substantial change in the alphabet, its efforts helped spark the evolution of a much-needed social statement.<sup>336</sup>

In response to this new state emerging in the Caucasus, the North Caucasus Society (*Simâlî Kafkas Cemiyet-i or SKC*) was created in 1917 (1335 in the Hijri calendar) in Istanbul.<sup>337</sup> The same people, although defined as separate from the CITC, founded the SKC, which dealt with basically the political issues, while the CITC handled more cultural affairs.<sup>338</sup>

The CUP financially supported SKC,<sup>339</sup> so much so that many members of its management worked directly in conjunction with the SKC. Unfortunately, CUP took a turn for the worse, leaving the North Caucasus Society detached from financial backing. Despite the massive loss, SKC changed its name to the North Caucasus Political Society and continued its efforts of organization. On 24 February 1919, SKC held a meeting to discuss the latest developments; 108 individuals participated, including Hüseyin Rauf Bey. Upon thorough observation and debate, members focused on counseling violent and hostile individuals who spread negativity among the patriots and disturbed peace among the Circassians.<sup>340</sup>

Due to the political atmosphere and more of a free environment for all Circassian people, women began to reap the benefits. The declaration allowed the Circassian Womens' Support Association (CKTC) to form with support from

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<sup>336</sup> Arslan, "Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire," 45.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, 50.

the CITC. It could even be considered to be the women's branch of the CITC. The goals of this association were to help Circassians in need, defend the welfare of girls and boys at orphanages, and provide education through schools and occupational schools. The CKTC was formed on 18 May 1919 on Istanbul's Akaretler Hill, at the Circassian Girl's School.<sup>341</sup> Five Çerkes women established it: Seza Pooh Hanım, Makbule Berzek, Emine Reûit Zalique, Faika Hanım and Hayriye Melek Hunç.<sup>342</sup> All of the founders were knowledgeable, educated, and of prominent backgrounds. Before the collaboration of the founders to form CKTC, they were all heavily involved with the CITC.

Hayriye Melek Hunç Hanım, president of the CKTC, was the sister of historical war hero Ali Sait Akbay Togan Pasha who was a commander on the Yemen front for a long time.<sup>343</sup> He was later appointed as the commander of the 25<sup>th</sup> Ottoman Army and Istanbul Guards in 1919, and during this duty he worked with many influential Circassian commanders to prevent the Circassians from joining the forces of Anzavur in the Marmara region.<sup>344</sup>

Hayriye Melek Hanım was the first Circassian woman novelist. She was also one of the first women novelists of the Ottoman Empire. She contributed many articles and submissions for *Gûâze* and left her mark in the CKTC's own magazine *Diyâne*. She released her first novel, *Zühre-i Elem*, in 1910 and again in 1926 with *Zeyneb*. Hayriye Melek Hunç Hanım had relations with many bureaucrats and militiamen, and played a vital role in political and social events.<sup>345</sup>

The CKTC was short-lived, and was suspended in 1924. The intent and focus of initiative behind its activities were similar to that of the CITC, with more attention towards Circassians, particularly Circassian women. It was described

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<sup>341</sup> Arslan, "Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire," 167.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, 181.

as being among the minority women societies that participated in and encouraged separatist activity. Its by-laws promoted a business/charitable non-profit organization to be built for struggling men and women. There was also the means for providing employment and offering free workshops in crafts such as embroidery and tailoring. Activities such as contests, concerts, and plays were also organized and catered to. These events were about uniting the people in celebrations of dance and music. Numerous publications, articles, and advertisements were displayed for the public to educate and get together. Charitable concerts such as *Fevkalade Konser* were advertised, attracting attention to Circassians all over the map.<sup>346</sup>

The CKTC managed to open up its own school called Circassian Girl School (*Çerkes Kız Numune Mektebi* or *CKNM*), educating both Islamic boys and girls. The private school was the first of its kind,<sup>347</sup> and hosted six classes, each of which contained about twenty-five to thirty students.<sup>348</sup> It began to run one of the only kindergartens in the territory and even had Mustafa Butbay as its principal. Intellectuals from all over the world notably taught there, bridging the gap between culture and well-needed education.<sup>349</sup>

The publishing body of the magazine, *Diyâne*, (meaning “our mother”) formed in March of 1920 as the CKTC’s other activity.<sup>350</sup> The first article of *Diyâne* was written by none other than Hayriye Melek Hunç.<sup>351</sup> In the article, “*Diyâne’nin Meslegi, Gayesi*,” she wrote how Circassians needed to unify their

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<sup>346</sup> Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 189.

<sup>347</sup> Samsun Birlesik Kafkasya Dernegi, “Çerkes Kadınları Teavün Cemiyeti (Çerkes Kadınları Yardımlaşma Derneği),” accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://www.samsunbkd.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=196:çerkes-kadınları-teavün-cemiyeti-çerkes-kadınları-yardımlaşma-derneği](http://www.samsunbkd.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=196:çerkes-kadınları-teavün-cemiyeti-çerkes-kadınları-yardımlaşma-derneği)

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 191.

<sup>350</sup> Samsun Birlesik Kafkasya Dernegi, “Çerkes Kadınları Teavün Cemiyeti (Çerkes Kadınları Yardımlaşma Derneği),” accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://www.samsunbkd.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=196:çerkes-kadınları-teavün-cemiyeti-çerkes-kadınları-yardımlaşma-derneği](http://www.samsunbkd.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=196:çerkes-kadınları-teavün-cemiyeti-çerkes-kadınları-yardımlaşma-derneği)

<sup>351</sup> Arslan, “Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire,” 202.

efforts towards intellect and innovation rather than war. This magazine played a major role in the recognition of women in Circassian culture and helped form social and philosophical transitions.<sup>352</sup>

## **B. RE-CREATION OF CIRCASSIAN ASSOCIATIONS: 1950S TO 1980**

The period between 1923 and 1950 was characterized as the muted period for the associations/organizations, since the republican elite were highly engaged in the idea of creating an ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation while disowning the heritage of the empire as well as the idea of pan-Turanism and relations with outside Turks and Caucasians.<sup>353</sup> As a result of the policies implemented by the government, which are described in the previous chapter, the Circassian elite incorporated themselves into the Turkish Nationalism discourse, avoided any ethnic activities and tried to preserve some figures of the culture in their private lives. Some Circassian emigrants were forced to leave the country, and continued their organizational activities in European cities—in Paris, Prague, Warsaw, and Berlin—together with other émigrés who had escaped from Soviet rule.<sup>354</sup>

The reorganization of the Circassian associations and resumption of their activities dates back to the first democratization movements with the establishment of Democrat Party rule in Turkey in May 1950.<sup>355</sup> The first association established in this environment was the Dosteli Solidarity Association (*Dosteli Yardımlasma Dernegi or DYD*) in 1946. Following this first association, in 1953, the Caucasian Cultural Association (*Kafkas Kultur Dernegi or KKD*) was established in Istanbul. This association included both members of the North Caucasians and Azeris, and starting from 1954, operated under the Turkish Federation of Immigrants and Refugees (*Türk Gocmen ve Mülteci Dernekleri*

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 428.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Lowell Bezanis, "Soviet Muslim Émigrés in the Republic of Turkey," *Central Asian Survey*, 13 (1) (1994): 69.

*Federasyonu or TGMDF*). In the following years, this umbrella organization diversified with the appearance of new cultural associations (*Kultur Dernekleri*). Later in 1961, The North Caucasian Cultural Association of Ankara (*Ankara Kuzey Kafkas Kultur Dernegi or AKKKD*) joined this first group. These associations are recognized as the nucleus of today's active diaspora organizations in Turkey.<sup>356</sup>

These first organizations had limited resources and were ineffective in political activities. They were not involved in any lobbying activities and their sole purpose was to sustain the ethnic identity among the Circassians through cultural activities. Thus, the founders of the associations were in alliance with the Turkish national policy.<sup>357</sup> According to Bezanis, "North Caucasian activism after 1950 served several purposes: to connect, inform and help preserve the North Caucasian community in Turkey, to counter assimilation, to fight communism within and beyond Turkey, and to accomplish this within the parameters of acceptable political behaviour in Turkey."<sup>358</sup> The objective of the Dosteli Association clearly demonstrates this aim:

first we would like to mention that our association established as a support foundation and has no political view to influence the politics in Turkey. Our aim is to create sufficient platforms for our members to meet and solidarity, to spread cultural influence among Circassians, to create sufficient conditions for the creation of new generations with the Circassian culture and language, to provide help to the poor Circassians, to provide books for the children of the

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<sup>356</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 428.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Bezanis, "Soviet Muslim Émigrés in the Republic of Turkey," 92.



poor, to publish journals, to look after sick members of the community, and to deal with their funeral ceremonies in cases of their death.<sup>359</sup>

These entire objectives were adopted as the official aims of all Caucasian organizations until the 1970s. These objectives have three basic characteristics. First was the consequence of the globalization in Turkey, and the immigration from rural areas to the more urban areas. The aim was to establish and preserve the solidarity to the Circassian community in urban cities, as well as the small communities in rural areas. Secondly, these organizations aimed to provide health and education support to the immigrant communities in the urban cities. Finally, they aimed to transform Circassian culture for the new generation. The basic concern of preservation of Circassian culture in the 1970s had become the primary objective since the associations had understood the difficulty of preservation and recreation of Circassian culture even in the rural areas as a result of the democratization and globalization linked to the mass immigrations from rural to urban areas.<sup>360</sup>

Many associations were created in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s. The efforts of the Circassian organizations established in the 1950s were limited only to cultural activities such as folk dances and cultural meeting. Although the importance of social support and solidarity were mentioned many times by these associations, they were unable to make common cause. During the 1970s and in response to the democratization and mass mobilization in Turkey, the preservation of culture once again became the primary issue for the associations. With the increased immigration from rural to urban areas, the objective of the

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<sup>359</sup> Erol Taymaz, "Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri," In *Türkiye'de Sivil Toplum ve Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2001), 453. Original version of the text: "Evvelâ şu ciheti tebarüz ettirmek isteriz ki, bir hayır müessesesi olan Derneğimizin hiçbir siyasî temayülü yoktur. Gayemiz, üyelerimiz arasında tanışmayı, tesanüdü, yardımlaşmayı temin etmek, kültür seviyesini yaymak, genç istidatların inkişafına imkân vermek. Göçmen hemşehrilerimize ve fakirlerimize maddî ve manevî yardım etmek, yoksul talebelerin kitaplarını temin etmek, imkân bulunca dergi çıkarmak, hasta üyelerle alâkadar olmak, tedavilerini sağlamak, icab ederse hastahaneye yatmalarında yardımcı olmak, vefat vukuunda ilgilenmek, muhtaç ise masrafını ödemek gibi sosyal hizmetlerdir."

<sup>360</sup> Taymaz, "Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri," 453.

associations became the preservation of culture in urban areas by establishing contacts among the Circassians who found themselves in the urban areas.<sup>361</sup> During the 1970s, cultural activities started to vary among the community. The associations organized language courses, amateur theater shows, folk dances, and publication of journals. However, all these activities were closed to the public and other members of the Turkish society. At the end of the 1970s, the lack of interaction between the host nation and the Circassian community led the way to the creation of more public activities to introduce the Circassian culture to the Turks. With democratization, people started to see their history and some taboos fade in the society. First, discussions on the assimilation of the Circassians among the Turks began, yet all associations and their members stayed away from politics and preserved their cultural objectives.

The change in the area of activities reflected the goals of the associations: *“compilation of traditional Circassian values, synthesize them with the world values and increase the cultural awareness of the members within these values, guide them to respect the traditional cultural values of the country and know the realities to become more useful to society as citizens, intellectuals; within social assistance and solidarity to help increase the level of welfare of the society.”*<sup>362</sup>

With the increase in cultural awareness among the society, returnist policy became significant among the members during the 1970s.<sup>363</sup> The very first publication mentioning the returnist policy was the Kamci journal.<sup>364</sup> Although its publication was banned with the military coup on 12 March 1971, it mentioned the difficulties of creating a cultural community away from the homeland, and supported a return to the North Caucasus. Later, the Yamci journal pursued the same policy, as did other journals. During the end of the 1970s, Circassian diaspora was shaped around five basic themes by the help of Circassian

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<sup>361</sup> Taymaz, “Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri,” 454.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 429.

<sup>364</sup> Bezanis, “Soviet Muslim Emigres in the Republic of Turkey,” 146–147.

associations: 1) homeland is the source of culture, 2) separation of community from their homeland, exile, 3) forced to live in a different geography, diaspora, 4) assimilation in diaspora, and 5) return to the homeland and merge with own community.<sup>365</sup> These were the main ideas by which Circassians defined themselves; however, with the military coup of 1980 and subsequent events, diaspora shaped around different ideas.

### **C. MILITARY COUP IN 1980 AND CIRCASSIAN DIASPORA POLITICS THEREAFTER**

With the military coup on 12 September 1980, all associations were closed, and the military government banned their activities. However, this tension was relieved after 1984, and associations started to emerge again in the public sphere.<sup>366</sup> Establishment of the “Caucasus Association” (*Kafkas Dernegi-KAFDER*) combining many other Caucasus organizations under one structure in 1993, was a critical turning point for the establishment of common policy in an organized manner towards the people in the homeland and diaspora. This merger also proved that the association may create significant political impetus within the diaspora to influence the politics as a social pressure group.<sup>367</sup>

There were significant differences between the activities of the association in the 1950s and the 1990s. The former was totally based on the cultural activities, whereas the latter started to include political participation (starting from the lobbying activities under the association structure). However, lobbying activities were hampered for three different reasons. First, some elite and high-level members of the association started it without taking the public support of the Caucasian peoples in Turkey. Second, the aim of the lobbying activities was not defined clearly. Many members did not understand whether it would serve for the needs of the Circassians in the homeland or in diaspora. Third, some

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<sup>365</sup> Taymaz, “Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri,” 455.

<sup>366</sup> Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 429.

<sup>367</sup> Zeynel Abidin Besleney, “A Political History of the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey Between 1864 and 2011,” PhD Dissertation (London: University of London, 2012), 138.

members understood the lobbying activities as a substitution for the cultural activities, and the significance of these activities diminished during this period.

Reconciling past turmoil with current objectives under a unified umbrella offered a chance to perform a unified function with a singular objective. This was not all-encompassing, due to the lack of understanding on the part of particular influential individuals or groups. It did, however, maintain a forward progression towards a modernization and union of former associations. This progress was made possible because of the progression and improvements in information and communications technology (ICTs) in the region due to the collapse of the walls of the Eastern bloc.

One of the most important achievements for the Circassian associations after the military coup was the commemoration of the 125th anniversary of the Circassian exile. The commemoration program in Ankara was the first organized activity with the participation of many domestic and foreign members of associations and the Circassian people, both in the diaspora and the homeland. It facilitated the meeting of the Circassians all over the world and as a result of this initial contact the International Circassian Association (ICA) was created in 1991.<sup>368</sup>

The 1990s brought about a renewed awareness of issues that lay dormant during the period of the Cold War.<sup>369</sup> The progression of ICTs was attributed to the renewal of awareness, but it was made clear that these issues were ever-present, but not recognized. The addressing of these issues was manifest in 1993, in Ankara, during the organized symposium held by the Caucasian Association (*Kafkas Derneği*) on “Socio-Cultural Change in Circassians of Turkey.”<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Taymaz, “Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri,” 455–456.

<sup>369</sup> Nuran Savaskan Akdoğan, “The Roots of Circassian / Chechnian Identity in Turkey,” (2008), 1.

<sup>370</sup> Kaffed, “Kaffed” in Genişleme Süreci,” accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/kaffed/federasyonlařma-süreci/item/691-kaf-der'in-genişleme-süreci.html>.

After the military coup of 1980, three distinct features fostered a big increase in both the number of the Circassian organizations and the varieties of their activities. These are the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the wars in Abkhazia and Chechnya, and the creation of the Caucasus Association in Turkey.<sup>371</sup>

The dissolution of the Soviet Union, and resulting improvements in the information, communication and transportation technologies, have unfolded new dimensions to the roles of Circassians in the Turkish community, such as awakening ethnic Circassian identity, establishment of Circassian associations in many parts of the country, and direct communication with the homeland. Many Circassians returned to their homeland; eventually, the increased relations between the autonomous republics in the North Caucasus brought to the table the question of who will represent the Circassians in Turkey. During this era, many associations were created as an alternative to the old and deeply constructed associations to obtain this responsibility as an opportunity. In response to the war in Abkhazia in 1992, and in Chechnya starting from 1994, associations had started “humanitarian aid and solidarity” activities in the diaspora. The first meeting organized by the association was organized as a social movement against the war in the Caucasus and gained the attention of Turkish politicians.<sup>372</sup> However, this wave of social movement and organization attempts ended with both relative success of their fights in North Caucasus and reluctance of the organizations to a social movement in Turkey as a pressure element. Russian-Turkish relations based on many different perspectives also affected the scale of the Circassian diaspora activism in Turkey. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey realized that she had to change the Moscow-centered foreign policy in light of changes in the former Soviet territories, especially in the Caucasus. Under Soviet rule, a political event in Central Asia or the Caucasus was considered as the internal affairs of the Soviet

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<sup>371</sup> Taymaz, “Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri,” 456.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

Union and Turkey did not take part in any political activity. However, after the dissolution, Turkey had to start political activities, and with the political vacuum Turkey emerged unwillingly as a regional power establishing relations with the newly emerging states.<sup>373</sup>

Turkey at first treated the Caucasus/Central Asia region as a whole without considering local differences. Turkey's boastful assumptions caused suspicion in Central Asia and the Caucasus region. In 1992, Turkey promised a huge amount of financial support to the region, which was not available in reality.<sup>374</sup> In February 1992, Turkish PM Demirel declared that a "gigantic Turkish world" was emerging from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China. That same year, President Ozal announced that the next century would be "the century of the Turks."<sup>375</sup> The main reasons behind this reckless policy were lack of knowledge and continuous changing in Turkish political actors. All kinds of resources were needed in order to rectify this initial policy failure and initiate an effective policy.

At this lack of resources, the diaspora organizations, which continued only cultural and solidarity activities till that time, turned into an important source of foreign policy given their accumulated knowledge and existing or potential ties with their homelands. Within this information vacuum, Caucasus associations initiated lobbying to increase Turkey's involvement in the regional events. Initial and amateur activities at the initial phase later turned to more organized lobbying activities. Turkey recognized the North Caucasus as a part of Russia, and they signed the "Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Republic of Turkey

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<sup>373</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 429.

<sup>374</sup> Ertan Efeçil, "Rationality Question of Turkey's Central Asia Policy." *Bilgi: Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 19, no. 2 (2009):78, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/963454270?accountid=12702>.

<sup>375</sup> Gareth M. Winrow, "Turkish Policy Towards Central Asia and the Caucasus," In *Turkey's New World: Changing dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, Ed. Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayari (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), 3.

and the Russian Federation” on 25 May 1992,<sup>376</sup> mentioning the territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs, as a result of the activities and demands of the diaspora organizations Turkey had started to develop an independent North Caucasian policy.

At the same time, returnist policy among the North Caucasus émigrés in Turkey started to get more interest among the Circassians. Associations started to establish close relations with the autonomous republics, Circassian organizations, and people in the North Caucasus; and continued lobbying with a close interest in Turkey’s domestic and foreign policies.<sup>377</sup> Associations demanded that Turkey, as the new emerging regional power, should take more active policy in the Caucasus since Turkey accommodated a significant percentage of the Circassian population and since it was recognized as a regional power whose involvement in the regional developments could affect the balance of power in the Caucasus. In order to achieve these aims, diaspora associations in Turkey tried to influence the Turkish foreign policy, especially during the Georgian-Abkhazian and Russian-Chechen Wars. In some ways, they were successful in their efforts, yet they were in all limited extent.<sup>378</sup>

In every official meeting, the Turkish government declared that they were supporting the territorial and political integrity of the countries in the region, yet nearly in all speeches and declarations Turkey continued her concerns about the conflicts in the region and human rights violations emerged from the conflict. Since openly opposing Russian policy in the region was not at all in parallel with the interest of Turkey in the region, the official policy about the region was shifted to acting in cooperation with the international organizations for ensuring stability in the region. Parallel to this approach, in the Organization for Security and

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<sup>376</sup> “Turkey’s Political Relations with Russian Federation,” Official website of Turkish Foreign Ministry, accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-political-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa).

<sup>377</sup> The panel titled, “What is Turkey’ North Caucasus Policy and what should it be?” In Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 430.

<sup>378</sup> Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 430.

Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Istanbul Summit in 1999, The Caucasian Stability Pact suggested by Suleyman Demirel, the then President of Turkey, could be considered as an attempt within this framework.<sup>379</sup>

Besides these initiatives, Turkey acted unofficially on behalf of the peoples of the North Caucasus and their organizations. The North Caucasus émigrés in Turkey created positive public opinion on behalf of the Chechens when they declared the independence of Chechnya in November 1991.<sup>380</sup> Moreover, on 9 November 1991, when four Chechen guerillas including Shamil Basayev, hijacked a Russian plane in order to announce the world Chechen fight against Russia and landed the plane in Ankara, the hijackers were not allowed to organize a press conference. However, they were allowed to return to Chechnya despite strong Russian pressure for their arrest.<sup>381</sup> Moreover, direct relations with leaders of the republics, including Cohar Dudayev of Chechnya, continued; Chechens were given the permission to open an unofficial representation in Istanbul to establish links with the Turkish émigrés; and Turkey continued to provide humanitarian aid to the region during the Chechen Wars.<sup>382</sup>

While these events were happening, the North Caucasus diaspora in Turkey continued its lobbying activities parallel to the Turkish foreign policy. After the independence of Georgia, Turkish PM Suleyman Demirel and Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin conducted their first official visit in July 1992. On the same days, Abkhazian leader, Vladislav Ardzinba, visited Turkey and held effective meetings with the help of diaspora organizations. In the absence of the Turkish Foreign Minister and PM, Ardzinba met officials from the Turkish Foreign Ministry and had interviews with the press declaring the independence of Abkhazia.<sup>383</sup> This caused troubles between Turkey and Georgia, yet the Turkish government

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<sup>379</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 430.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, 431.



did not restrict the activities of North Caucasus associations in Turkey. As a result of lobbying activities of these associations, Turkish public opinion mostly supported the Abkhazian side in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. However, the analogy between the Abkhazian issue and the Kurdish population in the southeast part of the country forced Turkey to support the territorial integrity of Georgia in the Abkhazian issue, and Russia in the Chechen issue.

However, the North Caucasus diaspora in Turkey wanted to see a more active and decisive Turkey in the region. The first reaction was the creation of the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee (*Kafkas-Abhazya Dayanisma Komitesi, KADK*) in Istanbul on 23 August 1992, with the participation of forty-two Caucasian Cultural Associations.<sup>384</sup> During the first years of its creation, the Committee aimed to provide humanitarian and economic aid to the entire region, in particular to Abkhazia, as long as the war continued. Secondly, the committee tried to create public opinion on behalf of Abkhazia in Turkey by presenting the Abkhazian issue and the war of freedom fought in Abkhazia by all means applicable. Thirdly, they collected all the necessary information concerning Abkhazia and broadcast them to the relevant people, institutions, and organizations. Finally, they tried to ensure sound communication between the Caucasus and Abkhazia and the people and organizations within the diaspora to carry out all kinds of activities to promote Abkhazia and the Caucasus.<sup>385</sup>

In 1992, KADK organized demonstrations in Istanbul and Adapazari to influence the public opinion about the Abkhazian issue, and on 27–28 September 1992, they held a walking protest from Istanbul to Ankara in order to draw attention. Later, they organized a protest outside the Turkish Foreign Ministry, demanding the independence of Abkhazia and resignation of foreign minister Hikmet Cetin. As a result of these mass protests, PM Demirel had a meeting with

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<sup>384</sup> Kafkas-Abhazya Dayanisma Komitesi Kurulus Tarihi, accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://abhazya.org/wp/?page\\_id=306](http://abhazya.org/wp/?page_id=306).

<sup>385</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 432.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

the representatives of the protest group.<sup>386</sup> This meeting showed the concerns of the North Caucasus diaspora to the politicians and public opinion, and the committee aimed to change the Georgia-centered Turkish foreign policy in the region.

One of the most important activities of the Committee was the parliamentary debate on the Abkhazian issue in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 13 October 1992.<sup>387</sup> During these discussions, with constant communications held with parliament members of the assembly, the issue was kept alive and actively presented in every suitable environment. The committee detailed files about the Abkhazian issue presented to parliament members submitted to the international organizations such as UN and OSCE.<sup>388</sup>

During the war between Georgia and Abkhazia, KADK organized relief activities on the Black Sea coast, and 37 people from the diaspora went to Abkhazia to fight on the side of their homelands. Four of them lost their lives in the war.<sup>389</sup> During the war, Turkey, on the one hand, provided humanitarian aid via the Turkish Red Crescent (*Türk Kızılayı*) to Abkhazia, and on the other tried to find peaceful solutions to the problem.

In the post-war period, KADK continued its active role in the negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia. In June 1999, Turkey undertook the role of negotiating between Georgia and Abkhazia with the participation of OSCE and UN representatives in Istanbul. Each side had 25 members in the talks, however, there were 10 members representing the Georgian and Abkhazians living in

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<sup>386</sup> "Cerkesler Basbakanla Gorustu," *Marje*, No.5 (Oct.1992), 8–14, In Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 432.

<sup>387</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 433.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

Turkey. This achievement can be seen the role of diaspora in Turkey.<sup>390</sup> With this meeting, diaspora organizations for the first time gained an official sanction to take part in the regional conflicts.

Today, KADK still works actively to create public opinion and political pressure over the Abkhazian issue. KADK's priorities are to create opinion on the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia after the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, to implement a non-violation pact between Abkhazia and Georgia to sustain peace, and to abolish the embargo imposed on Abkhazia.<sup>391</sup> All these are significant developments as they show that the Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey was an effective instrument during the 1990s in the development and shaping of the events. However, later with the rise of bilateral relations between Turkey and Georgia, and also Turkey and Russia, Turkey abstained from involvement in regional conflicts and supported the territorial integrity of the countries in the region.

The Chechen problem is another sensitive issue for Turkey, with its resemblance to the Kurdish issue. This prevented Turkey from implementing independent policies although the associations in Turkey were active in terms of creating public awareness on behalf of the Chechen side. The Turkish–Chechen relations that can be said to have started relatively well within that framework, later on deteriorated and became the status quo, heavily criticized by the diaspora.<sup>392</sup>

Turkey followed the developments in Chechnya during the disintegration phase of the Soviet Union. After 27 October 1991, when Cohar Dudayev was elected President of the Chechen–Ingush Republic, Turkey started bilateral unofficial relations with Chechnya and Dudayev, but refrained from officially

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<sup>390</sup> "Turkey Hosts Georgian-Abkhazian Problem Meeting," Turkish Daily News, 9 June 1999, In Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 433.

<sup>391</sup> "Kafkas-Abhazya Dayanisma Komitesi," accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://abhazya.org/wp/?page\\_id=306](http://abhazya.org/wp/?page_id=306)

<sup>392</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 434.

recognizing the independence of Chechnya that was declared in November 1991.<sup>393</sup> The North Caucasus diaspora criticized the Turkish government for not sending a representative to the swearing-in ceremony of Dudayev. However, Dudayev made his first visit to Turkey and to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in September 1992, giving a symbolic message to Russia and the whole world about the Chechen issue and its similarity with the Cyprus case. Later, in 1993, Dudayev came to Turkey as a guest of President Suleyman Demirel and had talks with the Chairman of the National Assembly and the Chief of the General Staff as well as the President, thereby telling the world that Turkey cared about Chechnya.<sup>394</sup> This meeting increased the Russian concerns, which were conveyed to the Turkish Ambassador in Moscow by adding that such kind of meetings should not be repeated in the future.<sup>395</sup> In terms of Turkish-Chechen relations, Turkey criticized Russia for using disproportionate force in Chechnya, yet behaved in a cautious manner to stress that it was an internal problem of Russia, and thus should be solved within this concept.<sup>396</sup> In response to the Russian criticism about Turkey's involvement in the issue, Turkey froze bank accounts holding funds raised by aid organizations for Chechnya, but remained silent about the support activities of the associations about Chechnya.<sup>397</sup>

After the start of the Russian-Chechen conflict, diaspora organizations established the Caucasian–Chechen Solidarity Committee (*Kafkas-Cecen Dayanisma Komitesi, KCDK*), similar to KADK. The Chechens were allowed to establish an information office in Istanbul. Also, the committee raised funds for humanitarian aid, helped refugees by setting up camps for the Chechen

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<sup>393</sup> Cecen-Ingush Baskani Turkiye'ye Geldi," *Turkiye*, 3 March 1992 and *Kafkasya Gercegi*, No. 8 (April 1992), In Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 434.

<sup>394</sup> Dudayev İkinci Kez Türkiye'de," *Panorama* 43 (2–8 Feb. 1994), In Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 434.

<sup>395</sup> Gareth M. Winrow, *Turkey in the Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 43.

<sup>396</sup> Aydın, 'Between Euphoria and Realpolitik', p.148, In Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 435.

<sup>397</sup> Celikpala, "Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey," 437.

refugees, and organized demonstrations in front of Russian embassies and consulates. While organizing all these activities, KCDK received support from many political parties, and to show that support to the Chechens, parks, streets and avenues were named after Dudayev in many cities such as Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir.<sup>398</sup>

In the early stage of the Chechen issue, the official political posture was pro-Chechen in Turkey. For example, foreign minister Murat Karayalcin said in a press conference, “we have family relations with Chechnya, and for this reason we cannot see this problem as the internal problem of another country.”<sup>399</sup> Similarly, during his official visit to Azerbaijan Husamettin Cindoruk, the Chairman of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, declared “if the Caucasus is Russia’s back garden it is also Turkey’s front garden.”<sup>400</sup>

The PKK-affiliated structures “Kurdistan Committee and Kurdistan Liberation Front” organized a conference in Moscow in February 1994 under the name of “Kurdistan at the Crossroads of History and Politics,” in which the Russian Ministry of Nationalities and Regional Policy took part as co-organizer.<sup>401</sup> This issue strained Turkish-Russian relations, and the Turkish Foreign Ministry sent a protest note through diplomatic channels; however, Russia denied all the attributed claims.<sup>402</sup>

The seizure of the ferry boat named “Avrasya” with its 211 passengers by the Chechen sympathizers led by Muhammed Emin Tokcan<sup>403</sup> on 16 January 1996 ended on 20 January 1996 with the telephone message of Dudayev conveyed to the militants indicating that they must stop their acts in coordination

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<sup>398</sup> Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 437.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid, 438.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Energy and Security in the Caucasus* (London: Routledge, 2002), 102.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 438.

with Turkish authorities because the hostages did not have any value for Russians, and the activities putting Turkey into a difficult situation must be avoided.<sup>404</sup> During his meeting with Turkish media on 26 February 1997, Russian Ambassador Kuznetsov declared Russia's concerns with regard to the trial of the ferry incident since the hijackers could be freed.<sup>405</sup> About the same issue, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov, attending the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) meeting in Bucharest on 28 April 1996, answered Turkish journalists' questions with regard to Turkey's Chechen policy as that "Turkey's official policy is in the manner of not supporting the Chechens but it is a fact that the Chechens are using Turkish lands."<sup>406</sup> After the end of the First Chechen War in August 1996, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk threatened Turkey and other Muslim countries with the cessation of diplomatic relations in the case of extending recognition to Chechnya.<sup>407</sup>

When the Second Chechen War started in September 1999, Turkey acted in accordance with the territorial integrity of Russia, since the Turkish government did not want to face with the Russian support to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, although the diaspora associations criticized Turkish foreign policy. Moreover, the 9/11 events were influential over the debates about terrorism. The continuous Russian propaganda to the effect that the Chechens had become Wahhabis, and were trying to establish Sharia law by promoting Islamic terror was backed up by a number of individual events, and it had necessarily some

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<sup>404</sup> "Denizde kabus bitti," *Milliyet*, 20 January 1996; "Böyle Kaçırdık," *Milliyet*, 03 December 1996.

<sup>405</sup> "Aydın Tarihi," Official website of the Turkish Prime Ministry Directorate General of Press and Information, February 1997, accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/ayin-tarihi.aspx>.

<sup>406</sup> "Aydın Tarihi," Official website of the Turkish Prime Ministry Directorate General of Press and Information, April 1996, accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/ayin-tarihi2-detay.aspx?y=1997&a=2>.

<sup>407</sup> "Aydın Tarihi," Official website of the Turkish Prime Ministry Directorate General of Press and Information, January 1997, accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/ayin-tarihi2-detay.aspx?y=1997&a=2>

negative reflections in Turkey and in the wider world. Many supporters started to debate whether the Chechens were terrorist or not, and this effected the public opinion negatively for the Chechens in Turkey.

During this period the Turkish government stayed indifferent, and this was found inadequate by the North Caucasus diaspora in Turkey, clearly with the declaration of 21 November 1999, The Caucasian Associations Assembly (*Kafkas Dernekleri Toplulugu*) stating: “We are content and hopeful as regards the decisive attitudes of the Westerners at the OSCE summit. However, the lands on which the Chechens live and which they defend to the death are historic lands bequeathed by their ancestors; and we are extremely offended by our governments who cannot openly say that defending their homelands...is the vested rights of Chechens’; they demanded active intervention on the issue of Chechnya by the civilized world.”<sup>408</sup> Starting from this event, diaspora associations have tried to carry the issue to the international arena in parallel with the official policy of Turkey.

The bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia in the 1990s followed a fluctuating tendency and were mainly strained because of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, Turkish activism in Central Asia, Turkish Straits, PKK and Chechen issue. However, the relations between two countries began to improve in the end of the 1990s. Three factors played important roles: Turkey’s acknowledgement of the political and economic limits of its power in filling the vacuum created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia’s relinquishment from great power status by accepting the limits of its power and the standpoint of both that the seemingly never-ending rivalry between them could be harmful for their own national security besides having negative impact on their relations with the West. “It was the limitations in their capacities that pushed both countries to a more balanced

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<sup>408</sup> Nart: *İki Aylık Düşün ve Sanat Dergisi*, No.15 (Nov.–Dec. 1999), pp.18–19, In Mitat Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 439.

and a generally positive relationship.”<sup>409</sup> Thus, carrying out a policy that is based on the national interests rather than the influence of ethnic groups and historical ties assumed more appropriate in terms of Turkey’s interests. As a result Turkey has tried to remain distant to the Abkhaz and Chechen problems, which were similar to her domestic problems. Associations in Turkey later defined their policies in view of EU and the developments that showed that the political involvement of diaspora will not be limited to the Caucasus and Russia but will raise the influence of the general policy of Turkey.<sup>410</sup>

#### **D. CIRCASSIAN DIASPORA FROM 2000 TO PRESENT**

During the 2000s, three different processes have identified the content and the influence of the Circassian associations in Turkey: democratization movements with the EU membership; improvements in the North Caucasus, and federation process of the Circassian associations in Turkey emerged from the internal dynamics of the associations.<sup>411</sup>

The European Union (EU) officially recognized the candidacy of Turkey for full membership on 12 December 1999, at the Helsinki Summit of the European council and a new era has started for Turkey in its long-term aim of westernization efforts dating back to the early years of the Republic. This decision increased the hopes on positive transportation on the human rights and democratization efforts, which requires more rights to the ethnic groups and organizations than they had before. At least, people expected these changes and have seen the potential of change in the domestic dynamics of Turkey.

Today, Caucasian Associations Federation of Turkey (Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu-KAFFED) plays a significant role to shape the Circassian diaspora in Turkey and plays a bridge role between the Circassians and the government to

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<sup>409</sup>Oktay F. Tanrısever, “Turkey and the Russian Federation: Towards a Mutual Understanding?” in *Turkey’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics* (ed. by Ismael, Tareq Y. & Aydın, Mustafa) (Great Britain: MPG Books, 2003), 129.

<sup>410</sup> Celikpala, “Influence of North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey,” 440.

<sup>411</sup> Taymaz, “Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri,” 456.



shape the future of the community. On 4 March 2007, a daily national newspaper published an article titled “Circassians initiated a cultural uprising” in Turkey, focusing on the transformation of Circassian identity parallel with the changing political structure with the EU accession talks and demanding to learn Circassian language, to preserve Circassian culture and to have right to visit the homeland without any restriction. The article also mentioned the real meaning behind this request by the words of the KAFFED president stating that: “Turkish citizenship is prior and indispensable for us. There is no family that did not have martyrs or veterans during the foundation of modern Turkey. Hence the protection of the secular and democratic indivisible structure of Turkey that we built together is very significant.”<sup>412</sup>

On 5 January 2009, *KAFFED*, representing 54<sup>413</sup> Circassian associations in Turkey, met the Turkish President Abdullah Gül and demanded Circassians’ requests on behalf of the community listed in three titles: first, Turkish citizens’ freedom of travel to Abkhazia; second, the inclusion of Circassian language and literature in the university curriculum, and third, sufficient TV and radio broadcasting in their own languages and cultures.<sup>414</sup> Later, on 19 January 2010, KAFFED president and the deputies met with the deputy PM, responsible for the “Democratic Opening Project” of Turkey under the westernization efforts, and requested same demands including the Circassian view of democratization that should encompass all the ethnic and religious groups in Turkey and not be specific just for the Kurds.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> “Çerkesler Kültür Ayaklanması Başlattı,” *Star*, 4 March 2007, <http://www.cerkes.net/basindabiz/cerkesler-kultur-ayaklanmasi-baslatti-star-pazar-eki-4-mart-t89.html>.

<sup>413</sup> KAFFED currently represents 54 Circassian Association in Turkey as of 20 October 2013, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/kaffed/uye-dernekler.html>.

<sup>414</sup> “KAFFED demands from the Turkish President on behalf of the Circassians living in Turkey,” (KAFFED’in Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanı’ndan Talepleri), 05 January 2009.

<sup>415</sup> “KAFFED Request and Expectations from the Turkish Government (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nden Talep ve Beklentiler),” 19 January 2010.

The formal acceptance of Turkey's candidacy for EU membership in Luxemburg Summit in October 2005<sup>416</sup> created a pessimistic atmosphere in Turkey in terms of civilian association (*Sivil Toplum Orgutleri, STO*). The EU requirement on the minority rights—usage of minority languages, encouraging cultural activities—diminished the government tension on the association. This process required some conditions for the Circassian associations. First, the EU is based on the multicultural structure and encourages this specification within every platform and requires the candidate countries to respect these features of the Union. Second, with accession talks the legal condition in Turkey started to become compatible with the EU legal structure on civilian organizations. In that respect, associations in Turkey have to adapt themselves into these new emerging legal criteria and follow their activities without conflicting with the new regulation not to be harmed within this evaluation. Third, the EU is an opportunity for the associations in Turkey to present the problems of the Circassian both in homeland and in diaspora since the role of the civilian associations is quite important to influence the Union's and individual state's policies. Fourth, with the accession process Circassian associations will have a chance to integrate with the other Circassian organizations in different countries and this interaction will enlarge the area of activities both in geographic dimension and variety dimension. And finally, the EU accession process will encourage the federation process of the Circassian association to create a common policy within this window of opportunity.<sup>417</sup>

Cultural relations between Caucasus associations and North Caucasus before the dissolution of the Soviet Union have ratified many dimensions. Lobbying activities have been initiated by associations to get the support of the Turkish government against the war in Abkhazia and Chechnya and previous cultural role of the association turned to cooperation with the Turkish state

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<sup>416</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry for EU Affairs, Chronology of Turkey-EU relations (1959–2009), <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=112&l=2>.

<sup>417</sup> Taymaz, "Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri," 456.

institutions to provide humanitarian and diplomatic support to Abkhazia and Chechnya on their wars. However, the Turkish government stayed silent against these situations close to its borders and even supported the territorial integrity of Georgia and Russia and abstained from creating a similar situation with the Kurds in its southeast region. During the Abkhazian war, Turkey rejected the asylum demands of the Chechen refugees in Georgian territories. With the relatively stable environment in the North Caucasus after the second Chechen war, with the rise of Putin to power and new Russian Chechenization or Kadirization policy, Turkey's influence in the region had diminished gradually. Until the 2007 International Olympic Community decision to allow Russia to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Circassian communities both in homeland and in diaspora remained relatively silent and focused on cultural activities.<sup>418</sup>

Another important step that would determine the activities of the Circassian associations and their efficiency was the creation of the Circassian Associations Federation (Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu, KAFFED) on 3 July 2003 in Ankara.<sup>419</sup> Comprised of more than 60 member associations throughout Turkey, and representing more than six million Circassians, the primary function of KAFFED is to conserve and advance the Circassian culture, language, and identity. This is emboldened through the unification and organization centered around the many cultural associations and corresponding foundations.

Although KAFFED has been perceived by many to be an ineffectual force within the Circassian political confines throughout the homeland and diaspora districts, these acts of cultural and social activities have vindicated their inactivity in the political realm. The recognized construct of KAFFED, to preserve cultural identity within the Circassian people, has been seen as a success and an influence on other Circassian organizations and foundations.

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<sup>418</sup> Taymaz, "Kuzey Kafkas Dernekleri," 456.

<sup>419</sup> Kaffed, Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu, Federasyonlaşma süreci, accessed on 10 December 2013, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/kaffed/federasyonlaşma-süreci/item/692-federasyonlaşma-süreci.html>

Being a founding member of the International Circassian Association (ICA), and the World Circassian Association (WCO), which is based in Nalchik, Russia, capital of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, KAFFED has maintained strong political ties with Russia. This in itself being attributed to the fact that in 2000, the ICA fell under the complete discipline of the Russian state design. During this period, KAFFED demonstrated full cooperation, despite the criticisms of other diaspora associations and foundations.

Despite several issues pertaining to their relations, KAFFED demonstrated restraint in voicing opposition. This was demonstrated yet again in 2005, when Adygheya experienced the crisis of facing elimination as a national republic. The announcement of the Olympic Winter Games to be held in Sochi did not ignite the response from KAFFED as it did other diasporas. They recognized “Circassian Genocide,” yet they did not oppose the games being held in Sochi, rather, there be recognized Circassian themes in place at the event.<sup>420</sup>

KAFFED has lobbied for Circassian rights and development since the early 2000s, during the challenges of creation of the Justice and Development party (AKP), taking a stance for Circassian language teaching, Circassian television broadcasts on state-owned channels, and various Circassian cultural rights to be extended throughout the region. It has been realized that other organizations and foundations had more of a vocal and clear approach to gaining these cultural dignities; KAFFED was not seen as extending their influence to a degree that was seen as strong in comparison.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, its counterparts have seen KAFFED as an ineffectual influence, despite its attempts at bringing about social recognition, order and unity to the Circassians in every region. Unable to bring about a tangible response concerning democratic reform program started by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP*), unofficial Circassian groups initiated a willingness to practice and take part in these processes.

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<sup>420</sup> Jineps, Sochi 2014: Geri Sayim ve Sonrasi, <http://www.jinepsgazetesi.com/soci-2014-geri-sayim-ve-sonrasi-12654.html>.

The matter of KAFFED in relation to Abkhazian association is a matter of situational obligation, versus regional goals. Beginning at the forefront of the Abkhazian-Georgian war, KAFFED and its forbearers invoked the responsibility of overseeing war efforts in order to focus political, monetary, and strategic outlines. This war was perceived as an internal Circassian effort.

For years diaspora associations lobbied for the Turkish government to acknowledge Abkhazian independence, even unofficially. This, however, failed, as the Turkish government has only deemed Georgia's establishment as tangible in terms of territorial rights. This lobbying, although unfruitful in many areas, eventually gained recognition through KAFFED representation resulting in the transnational organization of Circassian-Abkhazian interests in Turkish parliament.

KAFFED has since been contacted by representatives of the EU, U.S., and other states, addressing current events and issues regarding Abkhazia. They are also looking for a stance in relation to situations revolving around Abkhazia. KAFFED also remains credited with keeping the elements of vital matters grounded in the forefront of Ankara, despite an increasingly chaotic and turbulent conciliatory program.

## **E. ROAD TO SOCHI**

The reawakening of the Circassian identity across the diaspora and homeland with the new claims to the recognition of Circassian exile, and in some countries as Circassian Genocide, with the announcement of international Olympic Committee's (IOC) decision on 4 July 2007, selecting Sochi as the location for the 2014 Winter Olympics Games.<sup>421</sup> "By an irony of history, the 2014 Winter Games will mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Circassian defeat in 1864, when after over a century of fighting, Tsar Alexander II declared victory for

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<sup>421</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 161.

Russia”<sup>422</sup> and ordered the exile of remaining Circassians from the port of Sochi to the Ottoman ports. More dramatically, “a victory parade was held on the Black Sea coast just north of Abkhazia, called Krasnaya Polyana (Red Glade)”<sup>423</sup> to commemorate the end of the Russian-Circassian War, and this place coincides with one of the main venues of the 2014 Winter Olympics. Second, Sochi was the home for the Ubykh, one of the Circassians tribe driven totally from the Caucasus and about to become extinct.<sup>424</sup> Third, the Olympic venue is full of many significant archeological sites concerning the Circassian history.<sup>425</sup>

In 1999, IOC provided an article for a reconciliation of ethnic disputes in the future Olympic locations by “recognizing and strengthening the role of the indigenous people in organizing and conducting Olympics.”<sup>426</sup> According to this article in 2010 the Canadian government involved natives on multiple organizational levels not only to raise the cultural awareness but also to honor this native people.<sup>427</sup> However, the Russian government declared that the “Circassian nationalism” is the biggest threat<sup>428</sup> in the region, and Putin on 5 July 2005 made a speech annotating the Greeks as the ancestors of the region, without mentioning the Circassians.<sup>429</sup> Putin’s attempt clearly can be explained in famous Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s words: “Violence can only be concealed by a lie, and the lie can only be maintained by violence.”<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Sufian Zhemukhov, “The Circassian Dimension of the 2014 Sochi Olympics,” *PONAR Policy Memo* No.65 (2009): 2.

<sup>423</sup> Thomas De Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 149.

<sup>424</sup> The last Ubykh speaking Circassian Teyfik Esenc died on 7 October 1992 in Haciosman village, Manyas, Turkey.

<sup>425</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 162.

<sup>426</sup> Olympic Movement’s Agenda 21: Sport for Sustainable Development. International Olympic Committee, 1999. [http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en\\_report\\_300.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_300.pdf), 45.

<sup>427</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 162–163.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>429</sup> “Real Snow Guaranteed: Putin,” *Russia Today*, July 5, 2007. <http://rt.com/news/real-snow-guaranteed-putin/>, in *The Circassian Genocide*, 149.

<sup>430</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 149.

The Circassians are generally stereotyped as being “peaceful and nonviolent” groups in Russian “internal abroad”<sup>431</sup> when compared to the other ethnic groups, yet there is real concern for Russia that this attitude could change leading up to 2014.<sup>432</sup> A prominent Circassian leader, Murat Berzeg, has stated that if the Russian leadership continues to ignore their protests and re-write history, this could be a “platform for irresistible escalation.”<sup>433</sup> He also claims that this ignorance may drive the youth into the rebels’ ranks, eventually making the Circassian-populated republics of Adige, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria follow the volatile path of Ingushetia and Dagestan.<sup>434</sup> The Kabardino-Balkaria outpaced Ingushetia in 2010 in terms of the number of attacks and their gravity, becoming the second most deadly republic in the North Caucasus after Dagestan.<sup>435</sup> Clearly, there is suitable room for different ethnic groups to organize a terrorist attacks in order to show their anger to Moscow.

Over the past decade, a wide variety of terrorist activities took place in Russia. The 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis; the February 2004 metro bombings that killed 50 people; the Beslan Hostage Crisis in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia on 1 September 2004 that killed 387 people most of whom were children; the November 2009 explosion that derailed an express train; the March 2010 Moscow metro bombings that killed 38 people; and, most recently, the January 2011 bombings of the international terminal at Domodedovo International Airport, which claimed the lives of over 30 people and left 200

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<sup>431</sup> Uwe Halbach, “Russian Internal Abroad: The North Caucasus as an emergency Zones at the Edge of Europe,” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (2010): 34.

<sup>432</sup> W. Alejandro Sánchez Nieto, “The Olympic Challenge: Russia’s Strategy for the Establishment of Security in the North Caucasus before 2014,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 24:4, 2011, 582–604, 585.

<sup>433</sup> V. Dzutsev, ‘Plans to Stage the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi Sparked Circassian Political Activism in 2010, Jamestown Foundation, In *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 8 (13) (2011), accessed on 10 December 2013, [www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=37380](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37380).

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Center for Strategic and International studies, “Violence in the North Caucasus, summer 2010: Not Just a Chechen Conflict,” *CSIS, Russia and Eurasia Program*, 6.

injured.<sup>436</sup> These show that militant groups can involve in attacks in every parts of Russia, and it will be all the easier for them to do so in their own territory like Sochi.

Russian reliance on strictly aggressive military solutions in the region has not only been largely unsuccessful, but has also increased the violence in the region.<sup>437</sup> The formation of new North Caucasus Federal District in 2010 also did not bring any stimuli to the region. The Caucasus community anticipates the future with skepticism and it is said, “the people live in anticipation of a war following the winter Olympics.”<sup>438</sup> Thus, Russia behaves in a cautious manner and increases its military presence in the region both for the protection of the Olympics and for the further scenarios.<sup>439</sup> Kremlin does not change its policy—or the lack thereof—towards the North Caucasus, basically relying on military measures. Russia should first reach out diplomatically to the Caucasus to establish legitimate relations with the various republics and ethnic groups based on something other than military action.<sup>440</sup> Yet, so far there is no improvement in Russian policy, and military measures in the Caucasus increase day by day.

The demonstrations against the Sochi Olympics continue all around the homeland and diaspora. Today, the battle over Sochi continues. On 19 November 2011, Adyge Hase/Circassian Parliament chairman Khapay called for 2014 to be declared a year of “memory and mourning” in remembrance of the

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<sup>436</sup> W. Alejandro Sánchez Nieto, “The Olympic Challenge: Russia’s Strategy for the Establishment of Security in the North Caucasus before 2014,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 24:4 (2011): 589.

<sup>437</sup> Nieto, “The Olympic Challenge,” 592.

<sup>438</sup> V. Mukhin, M. Fatullaev, “Dagestanskij terroristicheskiy polygon,” in Alexey Maleshenko What the North Caucasus Means to Russia,” *Russia/NIS Center*, 7 (2011): 21.

<sup>439</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Russian Security Services Plan Wide Surveillance During Sochi Olympics,” Jamestown Foundation, accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nc/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=41492&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=24&cHash=e9c7bd79a6710076fb53bec36ea3dd45](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nc/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41492&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=24&cHash=e9c7bd79a6710076fb53bec36ea3dd45).

<sup>440</sup> Nieto, “The Olympic Challenge,” 599.



150th anniversary of the “the Great Exile.”<sup>441</sup> Protests and plans to publicize the event continue apace. The issue was even discussed on the pages of *Time* magazine on 28 November 2011:

Before this region became part of the Russian empire, an indigenous group known as the Circassians had lived there for millennia. Defeated by the Czar in 1864, they were herded to the same Sochi shore where the Games will be held and waited there for death or exile. In all, some 300,000 died, victims of disease, war and famine. Many fled to the U.S., Turkey and the Middle East. Now a large Circassian community in New Jersey has organized the No Sochi 2014 campaign, which included protests at the 2010 Vancouver Games. YOU’LL BE SKIING ON MASS GRAVES is one of the more pungent warnings in its literature.<sup>442</sup>

Although dangerous for the establishment of the Circassian political agenda, the opposition against the Circassians from Moscow is an expected behavior. The unexpected thing is how the Circassians in terms of individual and association are divided over the topic both in homeland and in diaspora. In the homeland, while a significant number of Circassian organizations oppose the games, on 2 September 2011 a group of Circassians in Kabardino-Balkaria announced a memorandum in support of the Olympics, and the coordination council of Circassian organizations, Adyge Khase, and the Union of Abkhaz Volunteers also signed the memorandum. Circassians Congress is the only significant organization in the region that opposed this decision.<sup>443</sup> Parallel to this discussion, International Circassian Association’s cultural demands were found

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<sup>441</sup> Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide*, 169.

<sup>442</sup> Thornburgh, “Olympic Dreams,” *Times*,  
<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2099428,00.html>

<sup>443</sup> Observatorio de Seguranca Humana, 2011, “Circassian organizations support the 2014 Sochi Olympics,” accessed on 10 December 2013,  
<http://www.segurancahumana.eu/News/1233-Circassian-organizations-support-the-2014-Sochi-Olympics>.

not sufficient and were not concerning the views of all Circassians, both in the homeland and diaspora.<sup>444</sup>

The diversity on the Sochi Olympics represents the similar attitude in Turkey. Many Circassians oppose the Sochi Olympics in 2014, but their reasons and demands vary in a big spectrum. Turkish Circassian associations, with the lead of KAFFED, commemorate the anniversary of “the Great Exile” every year starting from the 125<sup>th</sup> one at 1989.<sup>445</sup> KAFFED’s official stand for the Sochi Olympics declared as “the recognition of the Circassian Genocide and Exile, repatriation of Circassians to the homeland without any obligation and allowing the émigrés dual citizenship who want to return homeland, promotion of return to the Caucasus, and preparation of rehabilitation programs for the ones who want returned to the region.”<sup>446</sup>

Demonstrations across the diaspora countries attract more people and enlighten the public about the denied rights of the Circassians. Demonstrations in Turkey signify the onset of the coming of a modernization of principles and moralization of activism in contrast to rebel or radical movements within the region.<sup>447</sup> Also, Circassian activism revives hopes and serves as a unifier for all Circassians all around the world. This activism sparks new interests in the Circassian world, stirs the consciousness of people and reawaken the identity politics both in homeland and in diaspora. After the 21 May commemorations in 2013, for the first time the Turkish president and PM sent letters to KAFFED mentioning their grievances about the Circassians’ deportation from their native

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<sup>444</sup> International Circassian Association, Resolution of the Executive Committee of ICA About ICA proposals to include measures that reflects Circassian (Adygh) thematic in the program of working and conducting of Winter Olympic Games 2014 in Sochi [http://mcha.kbsu.ru/english/m\\_ispolkom29E.htm](http://mcha.kbsu.ru/english/m_ispolkom29E.htm).

<sup>445</sup> Omur Enes, “21 Mayıs Anma etkinlikleri (21 May Commomeration Activities),” KAFFED, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/bilgi-belge/soykirim-surgun/item/31-21-mayis-anma-etkinlikleri.html>

<sup>446</sup> “Çerkes Soykırımı, Soçi 2014 ve Yükselen Çerkes Muhalefeti,” KAFFED, <http://www.kaffed.org/index.php/kose-bucak-yazilari/item/1660-çerkes-soykırımı,-soçi-2014-ve-yükselen-çerkes-muhalefeti.html>.

<sup>447</sup> Çerkezler Sochi Olimpiyatları’nı protesto etti, İHA, 18 May 2013, <http://www.ihha.com.tr/gundem/cerkezler-sochi-olimpiyatlarini-protesto-etti/277310>.

lands.<sup>448</sup> However, no significant politician participated in the ceremonies organized in Samsun, on the Black Sea coast.

When Turkey-Russia relations are considered during the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*), it would be difficult for Circassian associations to convince the current government to accept the Circassian exile as genocide and to expect the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia. The intellectual architect of the Turkish foreign policy vision during the AKP rule defined by the foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's five principles to establish balance between security and democracy in the country to "have a chance to establish an area of influence in its environs," to follow "zero problem policy toward Turkey's neighbors," "to develop relations with the neighboring regions and beyond," "adherence to a multi-dimensional foreign policy" as complementary not as competitive and the pursuance of a "rhythmic diplomacy."<sup>449</sup> Based on these foreign policy guidelines Turkey-Russia relations eventually developed during the AKP rule and in 2004 "Joint Declaration between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on Deepening Friendship and Multi-Dimensional Partnership" covering cooperation in various fields was signed in 2004.<sup>450</sup> Later, the "Joint Declaration between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on Progress towards a New Stage in Relations and Further Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership" was signed in Moscow on 13 February 2009.<sup>451</sup> Until now, the bilateral relations did not get

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<sup>448</sup> Erdoğan: Çerkez soykırımı unutulmayacak, aynı şuurla hatırlanacaktır, *Zaman*, 26 May 2013, accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://www.zaman.com.tr/politika\\_erdogan-cherkez-soykirimi-unutulmayacak-ayni-suurla-hatirlanacaktır\\_2093924.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/politika_erdogan-cherkez-soykirimi-unutulmayacak-ayni-suurla-hatirlanacaktır_2093924.html).

<sup>449</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye Merkez Ulke Olmalı," *Radikal*, 26 February 2004; Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey*, 2008, Volume 10, Number 1, 79–83.

<sup>450</sup> "Türkiye-Rusya: İşbirliğimiz ivme kazanacak," *Hürriyet*, 06 December 2004.

<sup>451</sup> "Joint Declaration between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on Progress towards a New Stage in Relations and Further Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership, Moscow, 13 February 2009," Official website of Turkish Foreign Ministry, accessed on 10 December 2013, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-declaration-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-russian-federation-on-progress-towards-a-new-stage-in-relations-and-further-deepening-of-friendship-and-multidimensional-partnership\\_-moscow\\_-13-february-2009.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-declaration-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-russian-federation-on-progress-towards-a-new-stage-in-relations-and-further-deepening-of-friendship-and-multidimensional-partnership_-moscow_-13-february-2009.en.mfa).

affected by Russia's confidently growing resurgence to become a 'global power' and Turkey's new pro-activist foreign policy vision aspiring to become a 'global actor.' Paradoxically, overlapping objectives between Turkey and Russia made them cooperate more in various fields. Lately, slow EU negotiations and the government insistence to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a substitution to the EU defined in the Turkish media as the new foreign policy advancements. Even the Turkish PM, said to the Russian president to "Take us to Shanghai and save us from the trouble," referring to the trouble with EU.<sup>452</sup>

## **F. CONCLUSION**

The first important contribution of the associations/organizations was their support for the recreation of Circassian culture and language, and subsequently Circassian nationalism. In the first period, the associations' activities were heavily engaged in cultural and social parts, seeking to stop further immigrations of the Circassians from the homeland to the Ottoman Empire and establish solidarity among the Circassians who were scattered all around the Ottoman lands. However, with the establishment of the Republic, all associations were shut down and their activities were banned until the 1950s. The political atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s led to the creation of associations again, yet this time they engaged only in cultural activities until the dissolution of the Soviet Union and creation of a diverse network of relations between North Caucasus, Turkey and Russia in the 1990s.

Associations (*Dernekler*), establishing language courses, cultural evenings, and short trips to the Caucasus, started to appear in every city and town in small scale. Also, international organizations with ties to the Caucasus started to appear beyond Turkey. For Circassians in Turkey this increased accessibility to their homeland has allowed them to "live on both banks of the river," as Ayhan Kaya has put it. Rather than militantly demanding a complete

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<sup>452</sup> Murat Yetkin, Tired of Brussels, Erdoğan asks for Shanghai, 23 November 2013, Accessed on 23 November 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/tired-of-brussels-erdogan-asks-for-shanghai.aspx?pageID=449&nID=58407&NewsCatID=409>.

right of return, many have found the status quo an acceptable compromise.<sup>453</sup> Circassians are not among the most pro-active ethnic groups towards autonomy or independence, and this silent posture effects the content of activities organized by the associations. All demonstrations and activities organized by the Circassians in Turkey ended up without any violent actions.

The second important conclusion is that different approaches of the associations towards the Circassians, both in diaspora and in homeland, created diversity among the Circassians. For instance some groups, sometimes called United Caucasianist, or Returnist, basically advocate the mass return to Caucasus, while the KAFFED emphasize the unity of the North Caucasus groups in diaspora. This shows that different ideologies have been internalized to a large extent by the majority of political actors. For KAFFED, Circassians in Turkey are state-linked diaspora, and thus it follows an accommodationist or moderate approach to the situation. By contrast some other groups like Caucasus Forum and United Caucasus Association (UCA) do not regard these three autonomous republics in the North Caucasus as proper entities or as an embodiment of homeland, and do not consider themselves as a diaspora with a state of its own. Therefore, they reject the moderate or more accommodationist approaches supported by KAFFED in relations with Russia, and follow political strategies that directly target Russia, specifically regarding it as a colonialist power and a suppressor in the region. Based on this diversification, KAFFED abstains to put Russia as a target and acts more responsibly following different approaches to homeland, even meeting with Russian foreign minister in his visit to Turkey in and supported the appreciated the Russian recognition of the independence of Abkhazia as the representatives of the Circassians in Turkey.<sup>454</sup>

Since the lack of political authority or ethnic representation, every situation or problem tried to be solved with the association, which hampered to focus on

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<sup>453</sup> Kaya, "Political Participation Strategies," 226–227.

<sup>454</sup> KAFFED Activity Report (KAFFED Faaliyet Raporu), accessed on 10 December 2013, [www.kaffed.org](http://www.kaffed.org).

one or more specific objective(s) about the Circassians. Associations have become the places for cultural activities, for language learning, for meeting with other Circassians, providing scholarship to the students, organizing tours to homeland, organizing exhibitions, and even organizing blood donations for the Circassians who need them. Within these variety of activities associations have so far established a clear level of consciousness among the Circassians, yet these activities and political stand have to be clearly defined and associations have to focus on clearly defined objectives to create a common dynamic.

Third, Islamic groups have achieved significant support in politics throughout the Muslim world and within the Ottoman Era in the past, but the impact of Islam on the Circassian diaspora is rather limited. It is clear that there is no single well-established Circassian association in Turkey, and the Caucasus Trust (CT) cannot be put into that category though it has Islamic aspects of Circassian diaspora. Activists with Islamic sensitivities have organized CT and they constitute a smaller number of intellectuals, the majority of whom do not practice Islam in a political way.

Fourth, the stigmatization of exile is still important for Circassians minds to form a collective identity. For the last couple of years Circassian organizations, basically the KAFFED, have organized commemoration ceremonies for the anniversary of the exile on 21 May of each year. These ceremonies have turned to protest movements, as the 2014 Sochi winter Olympics gets closer. In 2007, the World Olympic Committee declared that the 2014 Winter Games would be conducted in Sochi, Russia. This place has a significant importance for the Circassians. As time passes, opportunities arise for problematic political issues, as do the opportunities for diplomatic resolutions represented by the unified voice of progress and growth.

## V. CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to examine the historical background of Circassians in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey; their identity discourse within these two state structures; their social and mutual aid organizations/associations and their effect on the public as well as the government vis-à-vis the relation between Turkey and the North Caucasus Republics under the superior structure of the Russian Federation. The Circassians are a relatively under-researched ethnic group compared to the other groups who came to the Ottoman lands as a result of Russian expansionist policy in the Northwest Caucasus (which is called by the Circassians in Turkey as “the Great Exile (*Surgun*)”) that gradually increased after the Crimean War (1853–1856) and reached its peak on 21 May 1864, which has been commemorated in Turkey, especially starting from 1989 (125th anniversary) as the anniversary of this tragic event.

To understand the formation of the Circassian identity within the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, there are some pillars each of which has its own effect over the identity that this thesis based upon. **The first and most important conclusion** is the Circassian identity or diaspora as a historical phenomenon with its positive achievements and limitations, **shaping and reshaping within the constantly changing political** limits that have been set by the politicians and ruling elite. Within this changing discourse, Circassians identity could not manage to create a homogeneous block to represent the group in Turkey and to uphold the problems of the people in diaspora, to create a bridge role between the diaspora and homeland, or to influence the policy in lieu towards the right of the ethnic minorities in the North Caucasus with their relations to Russia.

From the very first years of the exile of 1864 to 1923, there has been no agreement or consensus on what it meant to be Circassian, let alone Turkish. There were some elites in the political sphere and in media who discussed the meaning of being a Circassian, but this, in political terms, meant different things to different groups. This particularly came up with the Anzavur uprising in

Western Anatolia, and showed that there were some people who were loyal to the sultan, and there were some who were loyal to the republicans. For this dichotomy over loyalty, personal ties played a great role. The significance of the slaves, both men and women, in the Ottoman state carried many Circassians to the important positions both in government and in military. Thus, there were a significant number of the Circassians who were loyal to the Sultan.

However, there were some other groups that had different views. There were some who were trying to form an independent state in Balıkesir region alongside with the Greeks and Armenians. Also there were another significant amount of Circassians who returned to the North Caucasus after their exile the 1860s.

Moreover, with the various approaches of the state towards the ethnic groups and the measures that the ethnic group takes against the state policy and to preserve the ethnic identity is a complicated topic. Through state policies in settlement, education, military service, jurisdiction system, and the intense discourse to create a new national identity and its transformation to a more ethnic Turkish nationalism which is based on various ways to homogenize the population via assimilation and exclusion, Circassian identity continuously constructed and reshaped vis-à-vis the Turkish nationalism

The lack of the Circassian elite after the creation and the reform phase of the Republic of Turkey increased the pressure of ethnic Turkish nationalism over the Circassian community. Circassians were influential figures in the state structure, especially in the military after their forced immigration to the Ottoman Empire. One of the reasons that the Ottoman government encouraged the immigration of the Caucasus Muslims to its territories was their reputation as brave soldiers. Thus, the role of the Circassians in the military was proportionately higher than the other groups in the empire. Their strong family ties as well as military capabilities were also influential in the creation of the Ottoman Special Organization (*Teskilat-i Mahsusa*), which was known as the secret clandestine service to carry out undercover activities. Eventually the role



of the Circassians decreased in this organization and in the state structure with decreasing role of the important figures such as Rauf Orbay, Recep Peker, Fuat Cebesoy, and many other Circassian in politics.

Later on with the strict rules to create homogeneous structure, minority politics were suppressed by the state between 1923 and the beginning of the 1960s, and state-sponsored nationalism increased. This period in Turkey for the ethnic group can be called as a silent period. However, even relatively less in this period, Circassians have found ways to sustain the ethnic identity in a peaceful way, including strategies and maneuvers other than being an exact opposition to the state.

Maneuvering within the Turkish nationalism, and claiming to participate to the public sphere of the population, Circassians on one hand try to eliminate the blemishes that attached to them with the stigmatizing identification of the Cerkas Ethem with all Circassians, and on the other hand claim the significant participation of their ancestors in the wars of the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey to show the importance of this group in the creation of the Republic and their right to as much honor as the ethnic Turks and other minority groups. Many Circassians prefer to keep silent against the state policies and try not to contradict with them, yet this behavior caused the narratives of rootlessness, loneliness, and inbetweenness among the Circassians for years. Mutual aid organizations and cultural associations have been a significant role to decrease this attitude among the Circassians and lately, this inter-communal dialog started to evolve and take the role of representing Circassians and their peaceful coexistence in the contemporary domestic and foreign affairs in the eyes of the ethnic Turks and other minorities in Turkey.

The second conclusion of this thesis is the **relation between the state and the ethnic group, which is not simply to identify**. The hegemonic characteristic of the Turkish National Identity and the relation with the sub identities are not easy to define such as higher versus lower, nationalistic versus ethnic, or suppressed versus suppressor. Simultaneously changing the political

order in Turkey and the fear of internal and external enemy idea on the one hand and the claiming of national and diasporic identity on the other hand have caused these maneuvers into a dilemma.

Just supporting the idea that Circassians are superior in the state structure in terms of their relations with the Turks is a misleading concept. Likewise, claiming that Circassians' relations with the Turkish state are pro-state or in league with the state is an oversimplified allegation. Their relations with the state structure have been far from being homogeneous, and these relations range from inclusion, exclusion, trust, loyalty, neglect, fear, and harmony.

Some Circassian activists define the Circassians in Turkey as in-between, fearful, and not brave, in contradiction to the bravery, loyalty and gratitude of the ancestors. However, all these definitions are the consequences of their long existence in Turkey starting from the Ottoman Era as a non-Turkish Muslim community. Most Circassians feel incompetent in terms of political and organizational participation in the state structure. Still, when someone says s/he is a Circassian, the insult of "Cerkes Ethem, Circassian girls and Circassian chicken"<sup>455</sup> is a usual response. These are the only common figures that have survived throughout Circassian history; however, the public images of Circassians have fluctuated between the migrant, the Muslims, the fighter, the citizen, the founder, and the traitor; and have constituted elements of the nation-state by the ruling elite and media. This policy or the lack thereof, in terms of defining the Circassians, is one of the formations of Circassian diaspora in Turkey.

Moreover, this undecided structure of the nation-state has been shaped since the end of the nineteenth-century, and still is one of the major discussions in Turkey with the democratic openings under the European Union (EU) membership process. The inclusion of the non-Turkish Muslim ethnic groups in the nation-building process has been conditional, yet much more contributory

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<sup>455</sup> Circassian chicken is a famous Circassian dish cooked in special days.

than the non-Muslim groups since they are always defined as “the others” in the society. Being a Sunni Muslim has been the facilitator for Circassians since the late era of the Ottoman Empire and was generally based on the Muslim identity; this binding force had been used during the War of Independence and for a short time after the declaration of independence on 29 October 1923. During the nation-building process, one of the important steps was the definition of the people of the new country. This time what differentiated “the people” from the others could not be the religion, or the ethnic Turkic discourse. Thus, loyalty attributed to the Circassians, which is a fragile and sensitive topic for Circassians. Eventually, this sensitive connection became more fragile with the rise of the ethnic Turkish nationalism in Turkey, starting from the 1960s.

The third important conclusion is the homeland for the Circassians, and **in the Circassian case homeland is a dynamic construction of political developments**, memories, narratives, and various perceptions of individuals as to the nature of “homeland.” Influencing both from internal and international relations, Circassians in Turkey constantly re-construct and re-shape the idea of homeland. Salman Rushdie’s words about the imagined diaspora homelands are helpful to understand the real meaning. “My today is foreign to me. My past is also waiting for me to hug in the lost city among the fog that I left behind years ago...from now on; we will create imaginary cities and villages, unseen imaginary homeland, not a real cities and villages.”<sup>456</sup> Significantly, the change of the political atmosphere in 1990s with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, democratization movements based on the EU norms in Turkey, and rise of the nationalities as a result of these changes in Turkey contributed to the transformation of Circassian activism in Turkey. The transformation of the Circassian diaspora changed relations both with homeland and Turkey. In June 1998, Prince Ali Ben-El Huseyin of Jordan visited many Circassian villages in

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<sup>456</sup> Salman Rushdie on the imagined homelands created at diasporas, “Bugünüm bana yabancı. Geçmişim ise sisler arkasında bıraktığım o kayıp şehirde kucak açmış beni bekliyor... Bundan böyle bizler, gerçek şehirler veya köyler değil hayali mekânlar yaratacağız, görünmeyen hayali vatanlar...” Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991), 94.

Turkey on his journey from Jordan to the North Caucasus. He was welcomed with great enthusiasm in all villages as the mystical hero of the Elbruz Mountains of the Caucasus. This showed the existence of a collective and imagined homeland ideal among the Circassians. Experiencing commonalities and differences, joy and sadness, enthusiasm and disappointment about the homeland, Circassians in the 1990s became part of the real diaspora with access to homeland. Today, there are ferry shuttles from Trabzon and Samsun to Sochi and Sukhumi; and regular flights from Istanbul to Krasnodar, Sochi and Maykop. The increased web of communication techniques also facilitates the communication between homeland and diaspora that helps the creation of more concrete relations.

Furthermore, since the 1990s, Circassians have become involved in more political relations with the Turkish state to define multicultural citizenship. They started to regard themselves as located in two geographies compared to the previous relations with the state and eventually some groups started to request dual citizenship to really define themselves as a diasporic community. However, there were some impediments for the Circassians to increase the desired relations between homeland and diaspora. The 1990s also brought new problems and difficulties for integration. The Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, Chechen Wars, and Georgia-Russia War caused the reputation of the region as an unstable area compared to its relative stability during the Cold War. This stigmatization of the region has created questions in the minds of the returnists in Turkey.

The fourth important conclusion of this thesis contributes to the understanding of nationalism without nation-states, showing **how Circassians imagined themselves, in the absence of state but in the presence of an imagined homeland with which they had had limited connection** for many years. Examining the ways that the diaspora imagined a homeland and Circassian community and the internal dynamics of the people (how they continued their identities) are crucial for social science on diaspora and

nationalism. In this sense, it is one step farther than Anderson's definition of "imagined communities" of a state and how people form a community and form a state based on this community. Circassians, in this term, form a community in lack of state structure, and even lack of any political or mythical leader. However, their creation of a different state (an autonomous region) within the boundaries of Turkey is clearly not a desire for them, as is clearly defined by the associations in many platforms. Yet, the relationship between diaspora and homeland and how diaspora can contribute to the survival of the homeland is the main problem.

Examining the Circassian situation during both the Ottoman and Republic periods, this thesis contributes to the literature on ethnic groups in Turkey and their relations with the state. Circassians are one of the communities that have been studied considerably less than the other ethnic communities (especially the Kurds) in Turkey. Since they never were part of the Ottoman rule as a state or khanate, and they were exiled to a land that was not their homeland in any part of the previous history, they usually lived in a quest concept and until the 1950s did not build houses to live many years. The idea of return and their scattered positions in Anatolia reduced their significance as a different community that had to be examined. Social studies in Turkey have mostly studied the other ethnic groups whose nationalism discourse is more visible and united, and whose relations with the state are defined by overt opposition.

The fifth important contribution is that exploring **Circassian nationality and identity gives some notions about the evolution of Turkish nationalism.** The methods, strategies and discussions of Turkish nationalism on non-Turkish Muslim communities and non-Turkish communities, the layered structure of the state and its approach to each layer show the approach to create a homogeneous nationality. The legal discourse on ethnic differences, and population exchange program after the Lausanne Treaty was a part of nation-building rather than protecting the right of the non-Muslim minorities, or giving them the freedom of being part of a different nation, though it was the same nation for many years. In the end, the new republic used many suitable tools to

create a nation-state. During this process, Circassians in urban places suffered much more than the ones in rural places still struggling to integrate the local Turkish culture. Associations were closed and members of them as well as the significant elite were forced into silence and inactivity between 1923 and 1950. Most of them were under state observation for years. The disbarment of these first immigrants from the political activity and the silence period in the first years of the Republic created a lack of leadership for the further years in diaspora. Moreover, defining Circassian nationalism in Turkey contributes to the understanding on how an ethnic group locates itself vis-à-vis the Turkish nationalism.

The sixth important conclusion is the **contributions of the associations/organizations** for the creation of Circassian nationalism. In the first period, the associations' were heavily engaged in cultural and social parts, seeking to stop further immigrations of the Circassians from the homeland to Ottoman Empire. Associations (*Dernekler*) establishing language courses, cultural evenings, and short trips to the Caucasus started to appear in every city and town on a small scale. Also, international organizations with ties to the Caucasus started to appear beyond Turkey. For Circassians in Turkey this increased accessibility to their homeland has allowed them to "live on both banks of the river," as Ayhan Kaya has put it. Rather than militantly demand complete right of return, many have found the status quo an acceptable compromise.<sup>457</sup>

The seventh important conclusion is that **different approaches of the associations towards** the Circassians, both in diaspora and in homeland, created diversity among the Circassians. For instance some groups, sometimes called United Caucasianist, or Returnist, basically advocate the mass return to the Caucasus, while the KAFFED emphasize the unity of the North Caucasus groups in diaspora. This shows that different ideologies have been internalized to a large extent by the majority of political actors. For KAFFED, Circassians in

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<sup>457</sup> Kaya, "Political Participation Strategies," 226–227.

Turkey are state-linked diaspora and thus it follows an accommodationalist or moderate approach to the situation. By contrast, some other groups like the Caucasus Forum and United Caucasus Association (UCA) do not regard these three autonomous republics in the North Caucasus as proper entities or as an embodiment of homeland, and do not consider themselves as a diaspora with a state of its own. Therefore, they reject the moderate or more accommodationalist approaches supported by KAFFED in relations with Russia and follow political strategies that directly target Russia, specifically regarding it as a colonialist power and a suppressor in the region. Based on this diversification, KAFFED refuses to put Russia as a target and acts more responsibly following different approaches to homeland, even meeting with the Russian foreign minister in his visit to Turkey and supporting Russian recognition of the independence of Abkhazia as the representatives of the Circassians in Turkey.<sup>458</sup>

Lacking political authority or ethnic representation, the association tried to solve every situation or problem, which hampered focus on one or more specific objective about the Circassians. Associations have become the places for cultural activities, for language learning, for meeting with other Circassians, providing scholarship to the students, organizing tours to the homeland, organizing exhibitions, and even organizing blood donations for the Circassians who need it. Within these variety of activities associations have so far established a clear level of consciousness among the Circassians, yet these activities and political stand have to be clearly defined and the associations have to focus on clearly defined objectives to create a common dynamic.

Eighth, Islamic groups have achieved significant support in politics throughout the Muslim world (and within the Ottoman Era in the past), but the **impact of Islam on the Circassian diaspora is rather limited**. It is clear that there is no single well-established Circassian association in Turkey, and the

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<sup>458</sup> Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu-KAFFED, KAFFED Activity Report, 2008–2009 (KAFFED Faaliyet Raporu, 2008–2009), Accessed on 10 November 2013, <http://kaffed.org/index.php/kaffed/faaliyet-raporlari.html>

Caucasus Trust (CT) cannot be put into that category though it has Islamic aspects of the Circassian diaspora. Activists with Islamic sensitivities have organized CT and they constitute a smaller number of intellectuals, the majority of whom practice Islam in other than a political form.

Ninth, the **stigmatization of exile is still an important factor for the Circassians'** minds to form a collective identity. For the last couple of years Circassian organizations, basically the KAFFED, have organized commemoration ceremonies for the anniversary of the exile on 21 May of each year. These ceremonies have turned to protest movements, as the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics gets closer. In 2007, the World Olympic Committee declared that the 2014 Winter Games would be conducted in Sochi, Russia. This place has a significant importance for the Circassians.

After all factors and circumstances are considered, Circassians identify themselves with different historical events. The exile is the most prominent one, and Circassians should annotate not just feeling the grief of the event but also teach this history to the next generations and the other groups in Turkey where they all live together peacefully.

These are the main conclusions that the thesis has reached, but there are different subjects that are not covered deeply in this thesis. One of them is the Russian policy towards the North Caucasus. The region has always been important in Russian history. Although the first chapter of this thesis summarizes the history of the North Caucasus, there are many significant events that determine Russian-North Caucasus relations. The region has started to deal with its instability and Islamic terrorism. Previously these activities concentrated on the eastern part of the region. However, starting from the end of the 2000s, there was an increase in the terrorist activities in the western part, especially in the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic. The reasons behind this rise of political Islam in the eastern part of the region, terror and its effect on Russian-Caucasus relations can all be listed as possible topics for further research.



Second, the gender dimension of Circassian activism is not discussed in this thesis deeply. The role of the Circassian women in the Ottoman palace is a well-known phenomenon. And, certainly, the wives of the Ottoman Sultan were influential on the politics between the Empire and the North Caucasus, as well as the position of the North Caucasus émigrés in the Ottoman lands. On one hand, Circassian women recognized with their beauty and gained the consent of many Ottoman sultans to enter the Imperial Harem. On the other hand, they were subjects of the slave trade both in the Caucasus and Ottoman Empire. After the “Great Exile” and the difficult consequences that the exile created, the female slave trade increased in the rural areas. Most of the Circassian women living in Anatolia did not participate in the Circassian activism, yet prominent figures such as Hayriye Melek Hunc and Sezai Pooh, who played important roles for the abolition of Circassian slavery, made great contribution to the Circassian activities in the Empire. Therefore, all these different aspects of the gender dimensions and activities of Circassian women must be considered as part of the women’s movement across the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.

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